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Security Council

Seventy-second year

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New York

President:	Mr. Delattre/ Mrs. Gueguen	(France)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Solíz
	China	Mr. Wu Haitao
	Egypt	Mr. Moustafa
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	Italy	Mr. Lambertini
	Japan	Mr. Bessho
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
	Senegal	Mr. Ciss
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	Ukraine	Mr. Yelchenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Allen
	United States of America	Mrs. Haley
	Uruguay	Mr. Rosselli

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President (*spoke in French*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Bahrain, Bangladesh, Brazil, Côte d'Ivoire, Cuba, Indonesia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Malaysia, Maldives, Morocco, Namibia, Nigeria, Norway, Pakistan, Peru, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, the Syrian Arab Republic, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to participate in this meeting.

I propose that the Council invite the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of Palestine to the United Nations to participate in this meeting, in accordance with the provisional rules of procedure and the previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Miroslav Jenča, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I also invite the following individuals to participate in this meeting: Her Excellency Ms. Joanne Adamson, Chargé d'affaires ad interim of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations; and Her Excellency Mrs. Anayansi Rodríguez Camejo, Vice-Chair of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

I propose that the Council invite the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of the Holy See to the United Nations, to participate in the meeting, in accordance with the provisional rules of procedure and the previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I now give the floor to Mr. Jenča.

Mr. Jenča: Today's briefing is taking place as important developments unfold to end the more than 10-year Palestinian divide and return Gaza to the full control of the legitimate Palestinian Authority.

Last month, when Hamas dissolved the administrative committee — a parallel institution to run governmental affairs in Gaza — it agreed that the Palestinian Government of National Consensus should assume its responsibilities in the Strip. President Abbas welcomed this crucial step, promising on 20 September at the General Assembly (see A/72/PV.8) that the Government would soon visit Gaza. The Secretary-General, the Middle East Quartet and several Member States expressed their firm support and encouraged the parties to build on the commendable efforts of Egypt to seize this positive momentum towards Palestinian unity.

On 2 October, Prime Minister Hamdallah travelled to Gaza with a delegation of some 150 officials, including ministers, key security agencies and heads of the energy and water authorities. On the following day, the Government held its first meeting in Gaza since 2014.

The United Nations has worked with the Palestinian leadership and the region in support of this process. Special Coordinator Mladenov has travelled repeatedly between Ramallah, Gaza and the region in recent weeks to support the reconciliation effort and alleviate the humanitarian crisis. He also led a United Nations delegation during the Government visit and engaged with the Prime Minister, as well as with all Palestinian political factions and civil society, to ensure their support for the implementation of the understandings reached between Fatah and Hamas in Cairo on 17 September. These understandings included a three-step process to advance Palestinian unity: the return of responsibilities in Gaza to the legitimate Palestinian Authority; subsequent bilateral talks between Fatah and Hamas in Cairo, including on public-sector employees, security and control of the border crossings; and consultations with all Palestinian factions.

On 12 October, with Egyptian mediation, Fatah and Hamas signed an agreement that enables the Palestinian Government to resume its responsibilities in Gaza. According to its provisions, by 1 November the Palestinian Authority should take control of the crossings of Gaza. Separately, a joint committee will be formed to resolve the issue of public-sector

employees that should complete its work no later than 1 February 2018.

A statement released by Egypt further highlighted that the Government should assume its full responsibilities in the management of the Gaza Strip by 1 December 2017. It was further announced that Egypt had called for a meeting of all Palestinian factions in Cairo on 21 November. The agreement does not contain any provisions related to elections, the formation of a national unity Government or the disarming of Hamas.

The Secretary-General has spoken to President Abbas and welcomed the signing of this intra-Palestinian agreement. Its timely implementation and concrete efforts to alleviate the humanitarian crisis will be critical to effectively empowering the Palestinian Government in Gaza. Its implementation should also facilitate the lifting of the closures, while addressing Israel's legitimate security concerns.

The agreement is an important step towards achieving the goal of Palestinian unity under a single, democratic Palestinian National Authority on the basis of the platform of the Palestine Liberation Organization, the Quartet principles and the rule of law. The United Nations will continue working with the Palestinian leadership and the region in support of this process, which is critical to reaching a negotiated two-State solution and sustainable peace.

I would like to take a moment to discuss the acute severity of Gaza's humanitarian crisis and continuing human rights abuses.

In an urgent call to action, during his August visit to the region, the Secretary-General called it one of the most dramatic humanitarian crises he had ever.seen. Since then, conditions have only worsened. For the sixth consecutive month, the 2 million people living in Gaza have received electricity for a mere four to six hours per day. The lack of energy has had a devastating impact on all aspects of their lives. It continues to disrupt essential public services, including health care, the water supply and sanitation systems. The equivalent of over 40 Olympic-size swimming pools of virtually raw sewage continues to flow daily into the Mediterranean Sea, leaving the whole shoreline contaminated. Gaza is an unfolding environmental disaster that has no regard for borders.

The quality of health care inside the Strip is deteriorating at an alarming rate. Access to medical care outside Gaza has also become increasingly difficult. As the Government returns to Gaza, it is critical that urgent measures be taken to reverse these trends.

Meanwhile in other worrying developments, on 26 September Hamas sentenced three men to death by hanging on the charge of murder, accessory to murder and burglary. There are serious doubts as to whether their trials and detention conditions in Gaza meet international standards. As in previous cases, if these executions were to be carried out, it would be in violation of Palestinian law, which requires the approval of the President. I urge Hamas not to carry out such executions, and I once again call on President Abbas to establish a moratorium on the implementation of the death penalty.

Turning to the broader situation on the ground, over the past month violence has remained at low levels compared to the rest of the region. Four Israelis were killed by a Palestinian attacker, who himself was shot, at the entrance of the Har Adar settlement on 26 September. It is deplorable that Hamas and others once again chose to glorify this attack. The United Nations urges all to condemn violence and stand up to terror.

On 4 October, the body of an Israeli man from the settlement of Elkana was found in the Israeli-Arab village of Kafr Qasim, with signs of having been subjected to extreme violence. Israeli authorities investigating the death arrested two Palestinians from the West Bank town of Qabatiya in relation to the incident. During the reporting period, in total 80 Palestinians were injured by Israeli security forces, and five Israelis injured by Palestinians. On 8 October, a rocket fired from Gaza towards Israel landed inside the Strip. No injuries or damage were reported. In response, the Israel Defense Forces shelled a Hamas post in central Gaza Strip, with no injuries reported.

Turning to the question of settlements, the Israeli High Planning Committee met on 17 and 18 October to advance plans for more than 2,000 housing units in Area C of the occupied West Bank. That includes in the new settlement of Amihai and a new neighbourhood in Kochav Yaacov, both designated for settlers evicted from illegal outposts by court orders. Separately, a tender was issued for 296 units in Beit El, and building permits for 31 units were conditionally approved in Hebron. Reportedly, the Hebron municipality is expected to appeal that decision, which would delay

the implementation of the building permits. Work began this week to prepare for the construction of infrastructure in Givat Hamatos, a settlement that, if built, would further disconnect East Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank.

I remain concerned about proposed legislation that, if adopted, would expand Jerusalem's municipal jurisdiction by incorporating several West Bank settlements. The United Nations reiterates that all settlement activities are illegal under international law and are an impediment to peace.

The year 2017 has seen a significant decrease in demolitions in Area C, as compared to the previous year. Against that background, approximately 13 residential, livelihood and public structures in the West Bank and East Jerusalem were demolished in the previous month. That brings the total number of demolished structures for the year to over 350. Meanwhile, the number of demolitions in East Jerusalem is quickly approaching 2016 levels, which were the highest since 2000.

I am particularly disturbed by reported Israeli plans to evict specific communities, including Bedouin in Khan Al-Ahmar, adjacent to the E-1 area, and in Susiya, in the south Hebron hills. Nearly all structures in Khan Al-Ahmar now have demolition orders. Many of the structures are donor-funded, including a school that serves 170 children. I urge Israel to cease the practice of demolitions, which has led to the displacement of thousands of people.

Turning to Lebanon, the situation has remained generally quiet in the area of operations of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) and along the Blue Line. On the occasion of Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) Commander Aoun's visit to UNIFIL, on 22 September, the LAF formally announced the deployment of the Fifth Rapid Intervention Regiment to the UNIFIL area of operations, thereby fulfilling its earlier commitment to expand the LAF presence south of the Litani River. The regiment has since deployed, and the coordination of activities between UNIFIL and the regiment has commenced. On 19 September, Head of Mission Force Commander Beary chaired a tripartite meeting during which the parties discussed the UNIFIL mandate extension under resolution 2373 (2017), violations of resolution 1701 (2006), Blue Line marking and ongoing liaison and coordination matters.

On the Golan, the ceasefire between the State of Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic has been maintained, albeit in a volatile environment attributable to the ongoing conflict in Syria. Both sides have stated their continued commitment to the Disengagement of Forces Agreement and support for the full return of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force to the area of separation, conditions permitting.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize that, despite the overall negative trajectory that has characterized the Palestinian-Israeli conflict for far too long, there are reasons for cautious optimism. During the previous month, thousands of Israeli and Palestinian women united in a two-week march for peace that included participants of all ages and backgrounds. The yearning for peace among both peoples remains strong. Such grass-roots initiatives by civil society are critical to building the foundation for peace, and they must be supported.

A key piece of the peace puzzle is to bring Gaza back under the control of the legitimate Palestinian Authority. The lack of Palestinian unity was identified in the July 2016 report (S/2016/595, annex) of the Middle East Quartet as one of the main obstacles to achieving a two-State solution. Current Palestinian efforts to return the Government to Gaza must be encouraged; they must be supported; and they must be successful. The parties have taken a crucial first step in that process. They have demonstrated a willingness to engage positively and in good faith. Yet overcoming their deeply entrenched differences will not be easy. It will take time, and there will be many hurdles to overcome along the way.

Success carries with it enormous opportunity, just as failure carries with it great risks. Palestinians need to decide which path they will take. The international community must ensure that they are given every opportunity and support to reach a positive outcome. We must ensure that work can move forward on ending the occupation and establishing a viable, sovereign Palestinian State that lives in peace and security with Israel.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Jenča for his briefing.

I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of Palestine.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): I congratulate you, Mr. President, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council and on France's able guidance and leadership of the Council this month. I also thank

Mr. Jaroslav Jenča, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his briefing and updates to the Council.

We meet at a moment of significant and rapidly evolving dynamics, as we are witnessing important steps being taken for healing the painful Palestinian political division and achieving genuine reconciliation and national unity in Palestine. Here in the Chamber, we reaffirm our abiding gratitude to Egypt, a member of the Security Council and a fraternal Arab country, for the efforts exerted to help bring about the agreement signed in Cairo on 12 October by the leaderships of Fatah and Hamas, to support its implementation to restore a unified, legitimate Palestinian Authority to the Gaza Strip, based on past agreements and the Palestine Liberation Organization's political platform, and to ensure the effective functioning of the Palestinian National Consensus Government in Gaza in all aspects, including Government institutions and at all crossings.

The reunification of our people, land and political system is among our highest national priorities. We are fully aware of its centrality to the achievement of our national aspirations for independence and the realization of our people's inalienable rights and justice. We are therefore undertaking the necessary steps, with due responsibility, in response to the calls of our people, first and foremost, as well as the regional and global calls for unity.

The international community's endorsement of those important developments and offers of cooperation are vital for ensuring their success. Of course, that should include efforts aimed at achieving the speedy lifting of the illegal and inhumane Israeli blockade that has been imposed on the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip for more than a decade. It should also include meaningful steps to expedite the reconstruction and recovery urgently needed to reverse Gaza's de-development and restore humanity and hope to our people there, especially our young people, for whom hope and opportunity are in such short supply these days. We therefore welcome all statements in support of Palestinian reconciliation, as well as Egypt's role in that regard, including the Quartet envoys' press statement of 28 September and the statements and efforts of the United Nations Special Coordinator and the Secretary-General himself, as well as those of the United Nations system as a whole, along with other regional and international partners, in support of the current efforts, with a view to alleviating Gaza's dire humanitarian and socioeconomic conditions and empowering the Palestinian Government to carry out its duties there.

Palestine is doing its part. Internally, regionally and internationally, we are upholding our obligations and implementing our responsibilities in line with international law, including humanitarian law and human rights law, in full respect for our adherence to the core international legal instruments, and in line with the relevant United Nations resolutions. We are doing this to the extent of our capacity and in spite of the enormous constraints, obstacles, hardships and setbacks imposed on us by Israel's occupation of Palestinian lands, including East Jerusalem, for more than 50 years, since 1967. That includes our active efforts to implement the Security Council's resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016), a landmark that holds the keys to a peaceful, just solution. In word and deed, we are complying with its provisions and the Council's clear demands. I would now like to make the following points.

First, as President Mahmoud Abbas reaffirmed yet again when he addressed the General Assembly on 22 September (see A/72/PV.8), despite the great odds, we remain committed to a two-State solution, based on the pre-1967 borders, and to securing it based on the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid principles, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet road map.

Second, we will continue to rely and insist on using peaceful, political, legal means to bring an end to Israel's occupation of our land and oppression of our people, and to finally realize the Palestinian people's rights and national aspirations. That includes the right to live in freedom, dignity and prosperity in an independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, along with a just solution for the Palestine refugees.

Third, we continue to call for an end to all Israeli settlement activities in occupied Palestine, in line with resolution 2334 (2016) and all the relevant legal provisions. Our approach, which is consistent with the international consensus and appeals regarding the issue, is adamant that only an end to Israel's colonization of our land and reversal of its illegal actions can salvage a two-State solution based on the 1967 lines and advance the cause of peace and security.

Fourth, therefore, we continue to appeal to all States to take practical measures to back up their

calls for a complete and immediate end to Israel's settlement campaign and their commitment to a two-State solution, including on the issue of distinction, as called for in paragraph 5 of resolution 2334 (2016). Israel has been the occupying Power — but not in any way the sovereign Power — in the Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, since 1967, and should be treated as such.

Fifth, since Israel has persisted with its flagrant violations, as documented to date in the Secretary-General's three reports on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016), it is essential that States, organizations and the Council itself take such measures in order to ensure accountability and rescue the remaining small potential likelihood of achieving a two-State solution. An attitude of continued contempt on the part of the occupying Power must not be cost-free.

Sixth, we are committed to a non-violent approach and have abided by that commitment for years, as has been evident in our continued political and diplomatic engagement in the quest for a just solution, our documented efforts on the security front, our calls for an end to provocations, incitement and inflammatory rhetoric and our clear rejection of terrorism in all its forms and manifestations.

Seventh, we recognized the State of Israel on a basis of the 1967 borders more than two decades ago, despite the Israeli Government's refusal to this day to recognize the State of Palestine, or even at a minimum to recognize the Palestinian people's right to self-determination and independence.

Eighth, in spite of Israel's intransigence and illegal behaviour, we have continued to engage in good faith with all regional and international initiatives for peace, even in exceedingly difficult circumstances. Looking back just over the past year, we have welcomed and cooperated with efforts by the League of Arab States, France, Egypt, Russia, China and the United States. We will continue to do so based on our commitment to a just, lasting, comprehensive solution, and we have repeatedly affirmed our readiness to resume negotiations, based on the long-standing terms of reference, in order to achieve that solution.

We must all ask why there has been no progress in implementing resolution 2334 (2016). What are the continuing negative trends on the ground that are destroying the possibility of a two-State solution? Why has a political horizon not been established and why have negotiations on all final status issues not been revived? It is not because this conflict is insoluble or intractable, as some Israeli officials would like us to believe. The Security Council has repeatedly, clearly and authoritatively outlined the solution's fundamental parameters. The answer is clear. It is because of the contempt of Israel, the occupying Power, for international law and the Council's resolutions. The Council is therefore paralysed. We do what is required of us, while the Council does nothing to implement its resolutions. And we wonder when it will act to do its part in this equation.

Despite the clarity of the Council's demands, Israel persists with its torment and collective punishment of our people, its arrests and imprisonments, its colonization of our land — where settlement activities have been advancing at four times the rate of last year alone and the thefts of land and demolitions of Palestinian homes and properties have continued unabated, forcibly displacing thousands — and its obstruction of all peace efforts. It does all of this unapologetically, systematically and shamelessly. It is astounding that a State can openly and proudly declare its intention to continue violating General Assembly and Security Council resolutions and committing war crimes, and boast about such violations, thereby making a mockery of the Security Council, the rule of law and the international system as a whole. That is all being done blatantly by the same State, Israel, which has the audacity to present itself as a candidate for membership of the Council.

As we hear arrogant Israeli statements deriding resolution 2334 (2016) and the non-stop, reckless advancement of settlement and annexation plans in occupied Palestine, especially in and around East Jerusalem and Al-Khalil, further entrenching the occupation, we cannot help but question the international community's role in fostering and allowing such impunity. Without question, the lack of accountability for such defiance and violations is at the core of that ongoing injustice.

As we witness the continuing inflammatory rhetoric with regard to East Jerusalem and Al-Haram Al-Sharif, fuelling religious sensitivities, and escalating provocations, incitement and racism against the Palestinian people and leadership by the Israeli Government, fomenting even deeper hatred, violence and terror by the Israeli occupying forces and extremist settlers against our civilians, in grave breach of international law and against all standards of decency

and morality, we cannot help but ask, when will enough be enough?

When the Israeli Prime Minister himself states that "[t]here was not and will not be a better Government for settlement than our Government"; and that "[w]e are here to stay forever; there will be no more uprooting of settlements"; when the Agriculture Minister boasts that "[t]here is not and will never be two States between Jordan and the sea"; when the Knesset Member of the Jewish Home Party states that "[t]he goal is to erase the paradigm of Palestinian statehood, both on the ground and as a concept"; when Minister Lieberman states:

> "I do not know what a settlement freeze is; take the data and go over it. Only this year we approved 8,500 settlement housing units in the first half. What freeze are you talking about? Look at the facts";

when a Likud Knesset member calls Palestinians "vile human animals" — I repeat, "vile human animals" — and threatens that

> "[i]f it were up to me, I would have entered the terrorist's home last night, take him and his family and execute them all. Yes, just like that, with no shame",

then the Council must know that they not only say what they mean, but they do exactly what they say.

In words and deeds, the Israeli Prime Minister and his governing coalition are opposed to peace, dismissive of international law, and work day and night to entrench the occupation and make the two-State solution impossible, thereby destroying the contiguity and viability of the Palestinian State and the chances for peace. Why does the international community continue to give Israel the benefit of the doubt when Israel repeatedly proves its ill intentions? The international community looks the other way, instead of facing the issue head-on and declaring to Israel that enough is enough. Why does the international community allow the Israeli Prime Minister and his Cabinet to claim there is no partner for peace, deny Palestinian rights and attempt to undermine or vilify Palestinian reconciliation, including by making hypocritical demands of Palestinian factions?

It is high time for the Security Council to stand against such ridicule of international law and the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations banning the acquisition of territory by force. The Council must stand firmly behind its resolutions and demand full respect and implementation, without exception. Israel, which has so methodically and deliberately trampled on the Council's calls and decisions, cannot remain exempt from the law. It must be compelled to comply or face the pressure and accountability that is triggered by non-compliance in all other situations. The Palestinian Government is upholding its obligations, including in respect of the Council's resolutions.

In the absence of Israel's respect, the Security Council and all States must step up their efforts to uphold their duties and obligations. No peace initiative will succeed otherwise. A people's freedom and independence are dependent on that, as are justice and peaceful coexistence. As many have said in the Chamber, the question of Palestine remains a litmus test of the rule of law and the credibility and authority of the Security Council. We continue to hope, and believe, that the time has arrived for genuine collective action to rise to the test, to make a peaceful, just and lasting solution possible and, ultimately, sooner rather than later, make it a reality.

The President (*spoke in French*): I give the floor to the representative of Israel.

Mr. Danon (Israel): Members of the Security Council meet in this forum and make statements. On most days they give speeches. But, today, we demand action.

Today we will make the case and prove that, beyond a reasonable doubt, there is no greater threat to peace and security than the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Iran has threatened the world for 38 years, and it continues to threaten the world. Iran and its proxies butcher innocent people. Iran violates human rights and seeks to wipe Israel, a fellow State Member of the United Nations, off the face of the Earth. When terror strikes, a trail of bloody footprints can very often be traced back to Iran. From Bangkok to Burgas; from Buenos Aires to Beirut, and all the way back to Tehran, there is no refuge from Iran's deadly deeds. Iran threatens the entire international community. It is therefore the duty of the members of the Council, on behalf of the international community, to serve as the judge and jury. Today, the Council must bear witness to the dark realities for which Iran is responsible. It is the Council that must decide the fate of Iran as we uncover its horrific abuses.

On behalf of the State of Israel, I hereby indict the Islamic Republic of Iran on the following charges: first, sponsoring and endorsing worldwide terror; secondly, violating human rights; thirdly, vilifying Jews and promoting anti-Semitism; and fourthly; seeking to destroy a State Member of the United Nations — the State of Israel.

As I stand before the Council to indict the Iranian regime, I stand with the people of Iran, and with good people around the world, who are peace-loving and freedom-seeking. Former United States Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger once observed that Iran cannot decide if it is a State or a cause. It is clear that Iran is a cause, and its cause is terror — sponsoring and endorsing terrorism all over the world. The Iranian Revolutionary Guard claims to export revolution to the world. What that really means is that it funds terrorism all over the world. We applaud President Trump for imposing tougher sanctions against the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.

In Syria, Iran has armed Bashar Al-Assad — the butcher of Damascus. Iran's support has allowed Al-Assad to pursue chemical weapons, Iran has provided thousands of fighters from its proxy Hizbullah to support the Al-Assad regime. Iran shows no signs of leaving Syria. Without Iranian support, the Al-Assad regime would have failed in its evil mission to murder its own people. The Iranian Ayatollahs sponsor Hizbullah's war chest, Hamas' budget of bloodshed and Islamic Jihad's terror funds. Thanks to Iran, Hizbbullah has increased its weapons arsenal to include more than 100,000 rockets and missiles. Those weapons are stockpiled deliberately in hospitals and schools throughout the villages of southern Lebanon.

Hamas has built a terror-attack tunnel directly underneath an elementary school of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. Just last month, Yahya Sinwar, the leader of Hamas in Gaza, described Hamas' relations with Iran as "fantastic". He confirmed that Iran is "the largest backer financially and militarily" of Hamas, and just a few weeks prior to that, Sinwar told a group of young people in Gaza that today Hamas could launch the same number of rockets that it launched during the entire 2014 conflict in less than one hour. Those are not just empty words. Hamas is already preparing for the next war against Israel.

Those ties cannot be ignored. Iran is waging war against Israel. Hamas and Hizbullah are simply doing the dirty work. The blood money speaks for itself. Hamas, Hizbullah and Islamic Jihad are internationally recognized terrorist organizations. Iran is their puppet master. It does not matter whether they are Sunni or Shiite. Their cause is death. They love death as we love life. One may ask: Does Iran limit its terror empire to one region? The answer is no. Whether the explosions in Bangkok, the suicide bombing against American marines in Beirut, the attacks on Jewish and Israeli sites in Buenos Aires or the suicide bus bombing in Burgas, Iranian terror strikes throughout the world. The evidence presented is conclusive and beyond all reasonable doubt. Iran is guilty of sponsoring and endorsing worldwide terror.

Allow me to make special mention of the people of Iran. They refuse to have their spirits crushed by their oppressive rulers, and they deeply desire to see the day when they will be free from tyranny. With that, I state the second charge. I accuse Iran of horrific human rights violations against its own people. I shall now present the evidence.

In Iran today, if you commit adultery, you will be stoned to death. In today's Iran — 2017 — if you are gay, lesbian or bisexual, you will be hanged from a crane. In Iran, if you are a girl as young as nine-years-old, you can be married off to a grown man. In Iran today, if you are a journalist and you criticize the regime, you will be arrested with no right to trial. And in Iran today, if you are sent to prison, you will be tortured. This is a regime that is living in the dark ages. Those violations of human rights cannot be taken lightly. Based on the evidence shown, Iran is guilty of violating human rights.

Iran's hatred for innocent persons is not limited to the confines of its borders, which brings me to the third charge. It is the leading advocate for the world's oldest form of racism — anti-Semitism. Ayatollah Khamenei, the Supreme Leader of Iran, is a Holocaust denier. He insults the memories of the 6 million Jews slaughtered by the Nazi regime. He claims that the Holocaust was "not real". He posts Holocaust denial videos online on Holocaust Remembrance Day. On two occasions in 2015 and 2016, his regime sponsored a competition in Tehran for the best Holocaust-denial cartoon. The total prize money amounted to $50,000. Iran's sentiment could not be clearer, but it does not end there.

A few weeks ago, Seyyed Abdolrahim Mousavi, Commander-in-Chief of Iran's armed forces, declared, "We will destroy the Zionist entity at lightning speed". He said Iran would "turn Haifa and Tel Aviv into dust". It was a clear call for the destruction of the Jewish State. Israel shares no border with Iran. We have never had a territorial dispute. Iran simply hates Israel because it is the world's only Jewish State. That is nothing else other than repackaged anti-Semitism. Therefore, concerning the third charge of militant anti-Semitism, Iran is, once again, guilty.

Iran has made it clear that it seeks to harm other nations and innocent people. It continues to pose a major threat to world peace and security by pursuing advanced military capabilities. It has not been shy about its ultimate goal: to wipe Israel off the map. It is that threat that forms the fourth and final charge — the assault on one United Nations Member State by another. Iran plans to do that through deadly measures. It seeks to destroy Israel by any means necessary. The Iranian regime has tried to obtain nuclear capabilities for years. Today, the regime's intentions are no different than before. Iran's mission is not one of deterrence. It is one of destruction.

The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) — the nuclear agreement — did not eliminate the threat of nuclear destruction. At its best, if Iran does not cheat with regard to the provisions of the agreement, the pact just delays the nuclear programme. It allows Iran's extremist regime to resume that dangerous pursuit in just a few short years. The nuclear deal gives Iran the benefit of the doubt. It places trust in Iran to cooperate with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). It allows the IAEA to monitor only the locations that Iran has declared to be nuclear sites. It is the Iranians who decide which sites are designated as nuclear and which are not. It is a game in which Iran makes the rules, picks the players and wins every time.

Iran's nuclear ambitions are not confined to within the bounds of the JCPOA. Take ballistic missiles, for instance. Iran launches illegal ballistic missiles capable of carrying nuclear warheads. That is a direct violation of resolution 2231 (2015). I challenge Security Council members to explain how the testing of ballistic missiles intended to carry nuclear warheads is non-nuclear. Therefore, concerning the fourth and final charge of attempting to destroy a fellow United Nations Member State, Iran is guilty, as well.

I hereby repeat the charges: first, sponsoring and endorsing worldwide terror; secondly, the extensive violation of human rights; thirdly, vilifying Jews and promoting anti-Semitism; and fourthly, seeking to destroy a United Nations Member State — the State of Israel. Concerning those charges, justice must be served. The Islamic Republic of Iran must be found guilty on all accounts. The Security Council now faces a choice. It can confront the Iranian terror empire by vigorously implementing its own resolutions, or it can stand idly by as Iran's reign of terror penetrates entire continents. Adopting and enforcing resolutions can save innocent lives. It is the Council's responsibility to implement them. Council members do not need to do that for Israel's sake.

We will defend our citizens, our values and our way of life, with all the necessary force and the full power of our convictions. If we are attacked by Iran, the regime will face no fiercer enemy than Israel. It is the innocent people around the world who need the Council's help, and we expect it to act. We must defend the lives of good people everywhere. We must defeat racism once and for all. And we must finally put an end to the Iranian threat to peace and security.

The President (*spoke in French*): I shall now give the floor to the members of the Security Council.

Mrs. Haley (United States of America): Our goal in discussing the Middle East is to work on peace, security and human rights for the region. We cannot talk about stability in the Middle East without talking about Iran. That is because nearly every threat to peace and security in the Middle East is connected to Iran's outlawed behaviour. For the international community's engagement with Iran, this is a time of clarity and opportunity. The United States has now embarked on a course that attempts to address all aspects of Iran's destructive conduct, not just one aspect. It is critical that the international community do the same.

Every six months, the Secretary-General delivers a report on the implementation of resolution to 2231 (2015), which the Council unanimously adopted. The report has always noted the International Atomic Energy Agency's findings that Iran is implementing the nuclear deal, but then it goes on. It lists the regimes multiple flagrant violations on the resolution's non-nuclear-related provisions. Every six months, the Security Council is presented with a laundry list of bad news, but somehow manages to hear only the good news.

Some countries, to their credit, have called out Iran for its maligned behaviour, but as a Council we have adopted a dangerously short-sighted approach. Judging Iran by the narrow confines of the nuclear deal misses the true nature of the threat. Iran must be judged in totality of its aggressive, destabilizing and unlawful behaviour. To do otherwise would be foolish. Such clarity brings opportunity. It gives the Council the chance to defend its integrity. It gives us the chance to work together as a community of nations to uphold the provisions of the resolutions we have all worked so hard to adopt.

The Security Council has repeatedly adopted resolutions aimed at addressing Iranian support for terrorism and regional conflicts, but Iran has repeatedly thumbed its nose at such efforts; worse yet is that the regime continues to play the Council. Iran hides behind its assertion of technical compliance with the nuclear deal, while it brazenly violates the other limits on its behaviour. We have allowed them to get away with it. That must stop. The list of the Iranian regime's violations of Security Council resolutions is too long to repeat here, so I will confine myself to the highlights.

Resolution 2231 (2015) bans the transfer of conventional weapons from Iran. Yet today we see Iran identified as a source of weapons in conflicts across the region, from Yemen to Syria and Lebanon. The United States, France, Australia, Ukraine and others have intercepted Iranian shipments of rocket-propelled grenade launchers, machine guns and anti-tank missiles, among other weapons, that are bound for Yemen. The Iranian regime has been a key source of arms in strategic military support to the Houthi rebels, both directly through its military and indirectly through its Hizbullah proxy forces. Not only is that a violation of resolution to 2231 (2015), it also violates resolution to 2216 (2015), which imposes an arms embargo on the Houthi rebels. Iran has repeatedly and brazenly violated not one, but two, Security Council resolutions on Yemen. Yet few on the Council have said anything at all.

Resolution 2231 (2015) also bans travel outside Iran by senior Iranian officials, including Major General Soleimani. And yet the Secretary-General's report (S/2017/515) lists multiple press photos and reports of the General travelking to Syria and Iraq. There are even pictures on social media of him visiting Russia. That is an open and direct violation of resolution to 2231 (2015). And yet where is the outrage of the Council?

There is more, plenty more. In resolutions 1701 (2006) and 1559 (2004), the Council unanimously called on Hizbullah to disarm. Nonetheless, Hizbullah is building an arsenal of war in Lebanon, with weapons supplied by Iran. Again, none of that is going on in secret. The leader of Hizbullah talks openly about the support Iran provides. He has repeatedly boasted that sanctions cannot hurt Hizbullah because

> "everything it eats and drinks, its weapons and rockets, come from the Islamic Republic of Iran".

Those are only the Iranian regime's activities on which the Security Council has taken a clear position. What about Iran's support of arms, financing and training of fighters for the bloody Al-Assad regime in Syria? There are also the consistent Iranian threats to freedom of navigation in the Persian Gulf. There are also the Iranian regime's cyberattacks against the United States, Israel and other United Nations States Members. Then there is Iran's imprisoning of foreign journalists and tourists on made-up charges. Some Americans, like Bob Levinson, have not been heard from in over a decade.

Unfortunately, we are not done yet. The Iranian regime abuses its own people. It imprisons or murders members of the political opposition. It persecutes Christians and other religious minorities. It denies the freedom of speech. It executes gays and lesbians. There is one more thing. The list of Iran's dangerous and destructive behaviour that I just outlined does not even include the regime's most threatening act — its repeated ballistic missile launches, including the launch in the summer of an intercontinental ballistic missile. That should be a clarion call to everyone in the United Nations. When a rogue regime starts down the path of ballistic missiles, it tells us that we will soon have another North Korea on our hands. If it is wrong for North Korea to do that, why does that same mentality not apply to Iran?

With our decision to take a comprehensive approach to confronting the Iranian regime, the United States will not turn a blind eye to such violations. We have made it clear that the regime cannot have it both ways. It cannot consistently violate international law and still be considered a fit and trusted member of the international community. The Council now has the opportunity to change its policy towards the Iranian regime. I sincerely hope it will take this chance to

defend not only the resolutions, but also peace, security and human rights in Iran.

Mr. Skoog (Sweden): First, I would like to thank Mr. Miroslav Jenča for the useful briefing this morning. I would also like to thank the observer of Palestine and the representative of Israel for their participation and contributions here today.

Sweden aligns itself with the statement to be delivered later today by the observer of the European Union, including with regard to the Iran nuclear deal.

Recent months have been extremely busy for the Security Council. However, despite the proliferation of new and re-emerging crises, we must also maintain our commitment to resolving one of the longest-standing conflicts on our agenda: we must continue to seek an end to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by reviving the peace process. In that regard, we welcome the efforts by the United States to achieve a return to meaningful negotiations, based on the relevant United Nations resolutions, international law and prior agreements. That is the only path towards realizing a two-State solution, ending the occupation and resolving all final-status issues.

A unified Palestinian leadership is critical for a return to meaningful negotiations. We therefore commend the efforts in recent weeks to further intra-Palestinian reconciliation. We welcome the agreement signed by Fatah and Hamas in Cairo on 12 October, as well as Egypt's crucial engagement in that regard. This is an important step in enabling the full return of the Palestinian Authority to Gaza. We encourage all parties to seize this opportunity and to fully implement agreed provisions in order to reunite Gaza and the West Bank.

The people of Gaza have lived in intolerable conditions for far too long. The population continues to suffer from the impact of only having electricity for a couple of hours per day and a lack of access to basic services, including water and sanitation, as we have just heard this morning. The return of the Palestinian Authority to Gaza should swiftly lead to actions that improve the grave humanitarian situation.

In addition, an immediate end to the Israeli policy of closure and a full opening of the crossings, in line with resolution 1860 (2009), are needed, while addressing Israel's legitimate security concerns. We also underline the need for unimpeded humanitarian access, as well as access for all international donors, to Gaza. My country is the sixth biggest donor to Palestine, including Gaza, in order to support the Strip's growth and stability, both within the European Union framework and through our own development cooperation, with between $40 and $50 million per year.

Last month, we heard from Special Coordinator Mladenov that "Israel's illegal settlement activities have continued at a high rate — a consistent pattern over the course of this year" (*S/PV.8054, p. 2*). More than 10,000 settlement units have been announced so far this year, which is more than twice as many as during the whole of 2016. We reiterate that settlements constitute a flagrant violation of international law and are contrary to numerous Security Council resolutions, including 2334 (2016).

The Israeli Government announced yesterday, and even today, decisions to advance thousands of settlement units, including in East Jerusalem and Area C, deep inside the occupied West Bank. The fact that two days ago — for the first time in 15 years — the Israeli authorities issued permits for 31 new settlement units in the Palestinian city of Hebron is of particular concern. This represents a new, deeply worrying trend in a place where tensions are already running high.

Settlements are resulting in the gradual fragmentation of the West Bank and have a negative impact on Palestinians' enjoyment of human rights, including freedom of movement, thereby severely impeding the right to education, health, work and family life. Our position and that of the European Union remains clear. We strongly oppose Israel's illegal settlement policy. Settlements dangerously threaten the viability of the two-State solution and destroy hopes for peace. This is why we condemn these Israeli decisions and we urge the Israeli Government to reverse them.

In the context of achieving a two-State solution, we would like to recall that resolution 2334 (2016)

> "Calls upon all States ... to distinguish, in their relevant dealings, between the territory of the State of Israel and the territories occupied since 1967" (*resolution 2334 (2016), para. 5*).

In line with this, the European Union has a policy regarding settlement products. Furthermore, all agreements between the State of Israel and the European Union must explicitly indicate their inapplicability to the occupied territories. This policy does not constitute

a boycott of Israel. We hope that the United Nations will be able to report on developments regarding this in the next reporting period related to the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016).

Next month marks the seventieth anniversary of the adoption of General Assembly resolution 181 (II), which recognized the two-State solution. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has lasted far too long. Countless Palestinians and Israelis have lost their lives. Fortunately, fatalities on both sides are at lower levels so far this year; however, a few weeks ago an attack in a settlement in the occupied West Bank led to three Israeli fatalities. Sweden unequivocally condemns this attack and all other acts of violence.

The international community must do everything in its power to realize the two-State solution. The peoples of Israel and Palestine deserve no less.

Mr. Ciss (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): The delegation of Senegal welcomes this open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. We thank the Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Mr. Miroslav Jenča, for his clear briefing on the major challenges that continue to arise in the Middle East.

One of these aforementioned challenges is the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict — a question as old as our Organization — which has endured on the agenda of the Council along with all its familiar, disturbing consequences. Indeed, on the ground negative trends continue to fuel violence and radicalization and move us ever further from the two-State solution, which in our view remains the only viable option. Senegal takes this opportunity to reiterate its condolences to the families of the victims of the recent violence and to reiterate its firm condemnation of violence and terrorism, regardless of its perpetrators or their motives.

My delegation welcomes the signing of the reconciliation agreement between Fatah and Hamas, facilitated by Egypt's laudable efforts. We hope that the will of the Palestinian political actors to reunite will be reflected in the formation of a national unity Government and the holding of long-awaited municipal elections.

Yet beyond the political aspect, we wish to see a lasting solution to the considerable humanitarian and socioeconomic challenges facing the Gaza Strip, including the lack of electricity and water and limitations in the public health and reconstruction sectors, which severely impact an estimated 2 million people, half of whom are children. In this connection, my delegation reiterates its support for efforts to ensure that the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East enjoys access to sufficient and predictable resources. In this regard, we welcome the contributions of more than $60 million pledged at the meeting held by the Organization for Islamic Cooperation on 21 September on the sidelines of the seventy-second general debate of the General Assembly.

We reiterate our support for the diplomatic efforts undertaken by certain countries, including Egypt, the Russian Federation and the United States, to revive the peace process, which has been at a standstill since 2014, on the basis of existing platforms, notably the Arab Peace Initiative. My delegation therefore continues to appeal to the international community — particularly the Security Council, the Quartet and countries of the region — to ensure that, like the Israeli people, which enjoys a democratic and prosperous State, the Palestinian people are able to achieve their legitimate aspirations to a sovereign and viable State on the basis of internationally recognized and guaranteed borders.

With regard to the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic, my delegation is of the view that two priorities should guide the action of the international community. The first is the fight against terrorism, in particular against the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and the former Jabhat al-Nusrah, based on a comprehensive strategy that takes due account of the imperative to protect populations and civilian infrastructure, in accordance with international humanitarian law and relevant Security Council resolutions.

The second priority is the search for a negotiated political solution under United Nations auspices. We therefore appeal to all parties — the Government, the opposition and civil society — to engage in good faith in the Geneva talks under the auspices of the Special Envoy with a view to finding a definitive solution to the conflict on the basis of the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex) and resolution 2254 (2015).

Before concluding, I refer to the conflict in Yemen in order to reaffirm Senegal's conviction that only a negotiated political solution between the parties — while respecting the legitimacy of the Yemeni Government and taking into account the Gulf Cooperation Council

initiative and its Implementation Mechanism, as well as the resolutions of the Security Council — will bring peace and stability to a country experiencing one of the worst humanitarian disasters of our time.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We would first like to thank Assistant Secretary-General Jenča for his informative briefing.

The agenda for today's meeting is "The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question", or at least that is what it says on the paper in front of me. However, the statements of some delegations so far make me question that. Perhaps they mixed up their agenda items and thought that today we were discussing the implementation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). We too are ready to address that issue, and we will not be the only ones who will have questions for some delegations about how they are implementing the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. But some delegations' failure to even mention the word "Palestine" is alarming and distressing, because quite apart from the fact that we are not seeing any progress with regard to a Palestinian-Israeli settlement, the absence of even a reference to it hardly fills us with optimism.

Meanwhile, however, we would like to emphasize that the turbulent events and new challenges and threats in the Middle East and North Africa should not overshadow the importance of resolving the Palestine issue, which is fundamental to the long-term normalization of the situation in the region. The continued impasse in the efforts to reach a settlement is extremely worrying. The current status quo is incapable of being sustained or lasting. In the absence of a peace process and a political horizon, the region is building up an increasingly explosive potential that could detonate at any moment.

The parties to the conflict are continually resorting to unilateral steps that hinder the efforts to relaunch the Palestinian-Israeli negotiation process. That applies to Israel's settlement activity, the provocative rhetoric on both sides, the outbreaks of violence and the difficult humanitarian situation, especially in the Gaza Strip. Against that background, we hear more and more often that the prospects for achieving a two-State solution to the Palestinian question are receding with each passing day. What is the alternative, if a one-State option, at least going on the statements of the parties themselves, is not in the interests of either the Israelis or the Palestinians? We believe firmly that there is no alternative to a settlement reached through direct negotiations leading to the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, living side by side in peace and security with Israel.

Russia has consistently emphasized its commitment to achieving a just and comprehensive settlement in the Middle East based firmly on international law, including the relevant Security Council resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative. In our view, it is essential to step up international efforts to try to find ways out of the current impasse in the Middle East peace process. We are working on it both bilaterally and through the Middle East Quartet of international mediators, and we support the active involvement of regional stakeholders. We believe that resuming direct Palestinian-Israeli negotiations on a universally recognized international legal basis is crucial, and we are therefore not withdrawing our proposal to hold a summit in Russia between the leaders of Palestine and Israel.

We note that there have been some positive developments in intra-Palestinian affairs. The agreements reached between Fatah and Hamas, in which Egypt played an active role, should significantly improve the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip. We hope they will be followed by other steps aimed at ensuring genuine national unity for Palestinians through the Palestine Liberation Organization's political platform, and that such a development will have a positive influence on the situation in the Middle East. We helped to facilitate the process, and we will continue helping to overcome Palestine's internal split through our contacts across the entire spectrum of its political actors. We greatly appreciate the Arab Republic of Egypt's energetic efforts in that regard.

The Middle East remains in a situation of systemic crisis on many levels. The approaching victory over the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant in Syria and Iraq does not mean that the threat of terrorism is about to be eliminated. Terrorists have spread all over the region and organized sleeper cells all over the world. We will need the united efforts of the entire international community and a truly broad counter-terrorism front if we are to combat this global threat effectively. There is work still to be done, and we will have to combine our regional and international efforts as never before. It is particularly worrying that extremists are exploiting ethnic and religious factors to incite discord and replenish their ranks, and have dealt a serious blow to

Christians and other religious and ethnic minorities who have lived in the region for centuries.

The current situation in the Middle East and North Africa shows the importance of developing coordinated approaches to resolving the acute crises in the region. We must reject the notion of external interference and the persistent attempts to impose ready-made solutions from outside. Conflicts can be resolved only through political means on the basis of a broad national dialogue, while respecting the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of every State in the Middle East, without exception, an approach that requires us to take into account and fully respect the traditions, national particularities and aspirations of the countries in the region.

In conclusion, I would like to go back to where I started and draw the Council's attention to the fact that the attempts to dismantle the architecture of the agreement on the Iranian nuclear programme have evoked negative reactions throughout the Middle East and beyond. The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action has been a significant contribution to normalizing the situation in relation to Iran and has given the efforts to stabilize the situation in the region extra impetus. The JCPOA continues to be an important basis for promoting confidence-building measures, and the commitments undertaken under the agreement, which was endorsed in resolution 2231 (2016), should be complied with by all the parties to it.

Mr. Llorentty Solíz (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): Bolivia supports the statements to be delivered later on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries and the Committee for the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

Bolivia thanks Assistant Secretary-General Jenča for his briefing.

I am somewhat startled as I begin my statement today, because in the past few years not only have we seen that the direction that these meetings have taken has turned them into a sterile routine, we are now seeing something that goes much further than that — an attempt to silence and render invisible the Palestinian issue, one of the most important subjects not just for the Council but for the entire Organization.

Bolivia was pleased that, on 12 October, the parties reached an agreement in Cairo making a settlement of the intra-Palestinian conflict possible. It will not only enable the Palestinian Authority to resume its full functions in the Gaza Strip as of 1 November, it is also a genuine expression of Palestinian unity. In that regard, we would particularly like to thank Egypt for its efforts on this and other issues in the region.

Bolivia also welcomes the statement made on 16 October by Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator of the Secretary-General for the Middle East Peace Process, in which he stated that, after the meeting held with the Palestinian Prime Minister, Mr. Rami Hamdallah, the legitimate presence of the Palestinian Authority would be strengthened with a view to partially alleviating the painful humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip. We join in supporting the contents of the statement to the effect that the agreement is an important step towards the achievement of the objective of Palestinian unity, with a Government with a single democratically and legitimately elected Palestinian Authority.

Despite this progress, we must recall that the inhumane blockade that Israel is inflicting upon the Palestinian people in Gaza persists. We wish to recall to the occupying Power that, since the adoption of resolution 242 (1967) of 22 November 1967, the State of Israel is in violation of the fundamental principles of Article 2 of the Charter of the United Nations, given that, to date, it has not withdrawn its armed forces from occupied Palestinian territories. Its belligerent practices against the population living in these territories impinges on their right to live in peace within secure and recognized borders, free from threat or acts of force.

Similarly, the 11 July report compiled by the United Nations country team in the occupied Palestinian territory shows the existence of a series of extremely harsh Israeli measures imposed in the Gaza Strip that have negative humanitarian consequences and continue to affect access to basic services such as drinking water for human consumption and the operation of health centres and hospitals, with a negative impact on the health of the Palestinian population, especially children. For this reason, Israel must bring an immediate and complete halt to the illegal blockade it is imposing in the Gaza Strip. It should immediately proceed to a continuous and unconditional opening of border-crossing points, in order to make it possible for humanitarian assistance, trade goods and people to enter and leave the Strip.

In the same way, we categorically condemn Israel's expansionist drive stemming from its intention to continue planning and building new settlements in occupied Palestinian territories, an extreme move that was reported in the press release dated 10 October, published by the Office of the Prime Minister of Israel, concerning the construction of 3,736 new settlement units throughout occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, in clear violation of resolution 2334 (2016). We stress that such statements or actions represent openly belligerent acts against the Organization, undermining any possibility of achieving a fair and lasting peace in the region and increasing the state of anxiety in which both the Palestinian and Israeli peoples live.

As a pacifist country, Bolivia believes that the only option for guaranteeing a fair and lasting peace in the conflict between Israel and Palestine is the path of dialogue, with clear expressions of political will to achieve the two-State solution, especially by the Government of Israel. We therefore reaffirm the importance of giving continuity to actions provided for in the 1991 Madrid Conference, the Oslo Accords of 1993, which recognize the existence of Israel and ultimately the creation of a Palestinian State and its right to live in peace and security, the Arab Peace Initiative proposed by the Arab League in 2002, and the road map of the Quartet of 2003 — all within the framework of multilateralism. Bolivia reaffirms its support for the self-determination of the Palestinian people and their right to have a free, sovereign and independent State, with the pre-1967 international borders and East Jerusalem as its capital, in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly.

Finally, we wish to express our expectation that the Secretary-General's next quarterly report on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) will appear in a written format, making it possible for us to prepare our statements on the basis of the report and to see the progress of the implementation of the resolution in detail. We believe that presenting report in writing in advance will keep the situation in Palestine from being invisible and silenced.

Mr. Bessho (Japan): This will be the last time Japan will make a statement in an open debate on the Middle East during its two-year term as a member of the Security Council.

Unfortunately, the Security Council has made little progress in the Middle East peace process or pressing regional issues in the Middle East region, including Syria and Yemen. Japan has consistently stressed the importance of the peaceful resolution of conflicts, the need to fully implement Security Council resolutions and other international commitments, and the need to generate confidence in a region where mutual distrust is prevalent. Japan has continued its sustained efforts, focusing on the importance of humanitarian assistance and social resilience.

On the Middle East peace process, Japan continues to support a two-State solution based on the 1967 lines with mutually agreed swaps, which will achieve peaceful coexistence between a viable Palestinian State and Israel, with secure and recognized borders. Japan emphasizes that this should be reached through negotiations based on relevant Security Council resolutions, the Quartet road map, the agreements previously reached by the parties and the Arab Peace Initiative.

An important step has been taken to mend the division between the West Bank and Gaza. Japan appreciates Egypt's efforts, in particular, and welcomes the move towards the Palestinian Authority assuming its responsibilities in Gaza. We hope that the agreement between Fatah and Hamas will be implemented in a timely manner. Japan believes that achieving effective governance by the Palestinian Authority in Gaza is essential for preventing conflict and making progress in the peace process.

At the same time, the reunification of Gaza and the West Bank should first and foremost alleviate the humanitarian crisis that affects every facet of life in Gaza. Last month, during the high-level week at the General Assembly, Foreign Minister Kono announced $20 million in additional aid to Gaza and the West Bank, including food aid and the development of a sewage network. To assist Palestine's development efforts, Japan is seeking to upgrade the Corridor for Peace and Prosperity initiative, contributing to capacity-building at border facilities and facilitating the distribution of goods. The economic development of Palestine provides an important basis upon which a viable Palestinian State and Israel can coexist in peace and prosperity.

Japan's assistance will not only promote the resilience of Palestine's communities and improve

economic conditions, but it will also promote confidence-building among the relevant parties. We are convinced that these measures will contribute to creating an environment conducive to a two-State solution.

Unfortunately, the two-State solution continues to be undermined by the issues of settlements and violence, often leading to a chain of negative reactions. Settlement activities are in violation of international law and physically erode the possibility of a two-State solution. They must be fully frozen. Violence is fundamentally incompatible with the peaceful resolution of conflicts and leads to bitter exchanges of rhetoric and response. It is heartbreaking to think of people on the ground directly facing this situation. Mindful of resolution 2334 (2016), Japan would like to reiterate that issues of violence and settlements must be addressed to reverse the negative trend undermining a two-State solution.

The implementation of multilateral agreements and Security Council resolutions is equally important to issues pertaining to Iran. Japan supports the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), which contributes to the international non-proliferation regime and regional stability. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), which verifies and monitors the implementation of commitment under this agreement, issued a statement last week that nuclear-related commitments undertaken by Iran under the JCPOA were being implemented. The statement also noted that the IAEA had had access to all locations it needed to visit thus far. Such words are encouraging.

At the same time, the implementation of resolution 2231 (2015), which endorses the JCPOA, is an important responsibility of all Member States. Japan believes that ballistic missile launches by Iran are inconsistent with the resolution. The June report (S/2017/515) of the Secretary-General on resolution 2231 (2015) calls upon Iran to refrain from launching ballistic missiles, which escalates regional tensions. In addition, the same report informs us that some individuals subject to travel ban are reportedly present in countries outside of Iran. Japan emphasizes the need for the comprehensive implementation of both nuclear-related and non-nuclear aspects of the resolution.

I began today's statement by noting that the Security Council has made little progress on Middle East issues during Japan's current term. This is not to discredit the important achievements of the Council over the years or the role it can play in the days ahead. Japan, together with other members of the Council and the international community, will remain actively engaged on the challenges facing the Middle East.

Mr. Yelchenko (Ukraine): I thank the French presidency for convening this quarterly open debate.

The Middle East is undergoing a rapid and fundamental transformation that is accompanied by a wide array of tragic events in Syria, Yemen, Libya, Palestine and other hotspots. The Middle East peace process is the alpha and omega of the current situation in the region, as well as the marker of the limitations and weaknesses of the existing regional security system. That is why any efforts aimed at restoring regional stability should take the Palestinian issue in all its aspects into account. Indeed, the presence of the representatives of Israel and Palestine at this table proves that the Palestinian question remains fundamental.

We join others in welcoming the decision of the Hamas leadership to dissolve the Gaza administrative committee, and we commend the effective mediation of all parties, first and foremost Egypt, aimed at advancing the process of inter-Palestinian reconciliation. We urge the parties to make the best use of the momentum created in Cairo and take further steps to fully to reunite Gaza and the West Bank under the legitimate Palestinian Authority. This must be done without delay considering, inter alia, the dire humanitarian situation in Gaza. Given that not much time has passed since we witnessed the escalation in the Temple Mount/Al-Haram Al-Sharif, we should not allow unilateral actions and inflammatory statements to push the situation to the edge.

On the ongoing stalemate in the peace process, one cannot help but underscore that the continued expansion of settlement activities does not contribute to the easing tensions and runs contrary to our expectations. Ukraine reiterates its position that the Israeli-Palestinian peace settlement lies within the framework of the unconditional fulfilment by the parties of the relevant Security Council resolutions, the Madrid principles, including land for peace, the Quartet road map, the agreements previously reached by the parties, and the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative. Both Israel and the Palestinians should refrain from taking any action that could undermine the prospects for a peaceful settlement. The statements of both Mohammad Abbas (A/72/PV.8)

and Benjamin Netanyahu (A/72/PV.3) we heard in the General Assembly last month left the impression that both sides are still oceans apart.

Syria remains one of the hotbeds poisoning the region with the seeds of geopolitical rivalry and sectarian hatred. We take note of the agreements reached in Astana on 15 September, in particular on the Idlib de-escalation zone. If the idea works, then a durable nationwide ceasefire could be within reach, giving a chance for a full-fledged political process to emerge. Ukraine welcomes the serious progress achieved in the fight against the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham in Raqqa and Deir ez-Zor.

The conventional defeat of Da'esh must herald a new opening and new hope for the Syrian people. However, the absence of tangible breakthroughs on the political and humanitarian tracks is a clear sign that so far, military logic prevails over the diplomatic approach. One the whole, the entire international community should avoid at any cost falling into the trap of short-term solutions on Syria. Such ad hoc fixes seem to deliver temporary relief, only to set the stage for a deeper crisis in the long term.

The fact that no root causes of the conflict have been addressed so far essentially means more opportunity for Da'esh and Al-Qaeda to capitalize on the grievances of the disaffected population. We continue to believe that there should be a longer-term blueprint for Syria — one firmly based on a commitment to a negotiated political settlement and the clear understanding of what will come next.

Ukraine is deeply concerned with the rapidly deteriorating humanitarian situation in Yemen. Millions there are facing the threefold threat of food shortages, cholera and violence. The rainy season and lack of clean water resources are set to further aggravate the cholera epidemic. The International Committee of the Red Cross estimate that cholera cases could reach a million by the end of the year is simply devastating. On the security track, Ukrainian is disappointed by the latest series of statements and provocative actions by the Houthi leadership. The threat to attack Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates with ballistic missiles is a clear disregard of international efforts to resolve the conflict.

Only lasting peace will allow us to reduce the sufferings of the Yemeni people. That is why the continuing absence of dialogue between parties and their unwillingness to sit at the negotiating table are unacceptable. The further fragmentation of the Yemeni political landscape is a cause of growing concern.

Tensions are high in other parts of the Middle East as well. There is a long and difficult path ahead to restore the long-awaited stability to the region, including through the efforts of the Security Council. In order to succeed, the Council has to stand united, and our hopes for that are still high.

Mr. Lambertini (Italy): At the outset, I wish to align myself in full with the statement that the observer of the European Union will deliver later.

I wish to thank the Assistant Secretary-General Jenča for his comprehensive briefing.

After three years of internal divisions that have taken a toll on Palestinian unity, the most recent talks between the Palestinian parties seem to mark an important step towards resolving the all of Palestine under a single, democratic and legitimate Authority. Italy notes with interest the meetings that took place in Cairo last week. We encourage both Palestinian parties to work together in good faith in order to achieve the long-needed reconciliation. At the same time, any agreement will need to respect Israel's right to exist and its legitimate security concerns. I commend Egypt for its mediation efforts, since all steps towards Palestinian reconciliation are essential to pave the way to the resumption of the Middle East peace process.

It is now high time that the living conditions of the inhabitants of the Gaza Strip receive long-overdue attention. We call on the Palestinian Authority to ease the economic measures that apply to Gaza as the discussions between the Palestinian factions proceed.

Consistent with our established position on the Middle East peace process, including with regard to the 1967 lines and to East Jerusalem, as set out in the relevant conclusions of the Council of the European Union, Italy continues to support all efforts aimed at restoring a political horizon, such as the round of talks headed by the United States Administration with both parties. In this regard, we reiterate our conviction that any viable plan must be aligned with the two-State solution, which is the only achievable one.

In the midst of all of the diplomatic efforts being made by the main partners and regional allies, it is important that all parties abstain from any provocation or initiative that might hinder the peace process. Italy

therefore reiterates its concern over the intensified expansion of settlements in the West Bank, reinforced by recent announcements and decisions by the Israeli Government that also affect the city of Hebron. As a genuine and close friend of Israel, we believe that those decisions run counter to the two-State prospect and undermine the chance of ensuring a future of peace and security for the parties, as also reaffirmed by resolution 2334 (2016).

On the Palestinian side, we expect a clear condemnation of all acts of violence, such as the one that took place in Har Adar in September. In recent days a great deal has been said about UNESCO in connection with the discussion that we are having today. However, we have also received good news from UNESCO. We appreciate, for instance, the adoption by consensus of the Palestinian resolution in UNESCO a few days ago on the events of last year, and we encourage further efforts in this regard to work for consensus in good faith.

In August, the Council approved the renewal of the mandate of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) for one more year. Despite the unanimous adoption of resolution 2373 (2017), during the negotiations diverging views emerged on how the peacekeeping mission should pursue its goal. As a member of the Security Council and as UNIFIL's largest troop contributor, together with Indonesia, Italy not only affirms its support for UNIFIL but also calls on all international partners to acknowledge and respect the differences between the specific tasks and prerogatives of the Lebanese authorities and those of its peacekeepers.

The recent deployment in the south of the Lebanese rapid-intervention regiment is evidence of the commitment of the Lebanese institutions to their own responsibilities. Italy will cooperate with the Secretariat and all relevant countries in the implementation of resolution 2373 (2017) while ensuring that improving the effectiveness of UNIFIL does not translate into any change in the mission's mandate. It also goes without saying that an expanded UNIFIL operation will require the mission's budget to be maintained at the current level.

Furthermore, the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), whose role in the national context is irreplaceable, will also be able to cooperate more closely with UNIFIL if they continue to receive the necessary support from the international community. We therefore call on all partners to renew their commitment to assisting and strengthening the LAF in every possible way. My country is willing to host an international meeting to advocate for broader donor support.

In conclusion, I would like to turn to the joint fight against terrorism. In Iraq, important accomplishments have been recorded. But freeing an area from the control of terrorists is only as meaningful as the degree of effort that we put into stabilizing the Iraqi territory. To that end, both the international community and the United Nations system will need to focus primarily on humanitarian assistance and restoration of essential services, so as to create conditions that will allow for the free, safe and voluntary return of refugees and displaced persons. In the medium and long term, a responsible approach to sustainable development will be at the core of any strategy for reconciliation, along with the inclusion of all sectors of society, so as to prevent the resurgence of terrorism.

Finally, in Syria, the fall of Raqqa city, where until recently the so-called Islamic State staged euphoric parades, is also a welcome symbol of the collapsing fortunes of Da'esh.

Mr. Moustafa (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank Mr. Miroslav Jenča, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his briefing. I thank also Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, who is absent from today's meeting, for his ongoing efforts in favour of the peace process in the Middle East and of its terms of reference. I thank him also for his continued efforts to contain the deteriorating humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip, and for his consistent encouragement of all Palestinian reconciliation efforts.

Over the past 70 years, the international community has agreed that the two-State solution is the best and most equitable solution to the Palestinian question. However, the prospects for the implementation of such a solution on the ground are dwindling by the day, and Palestinian territories are being subjected to waves of illegal settlement activity. I believe, therefore, that we must rise up together to address these setbacks, which threaten the life, safety and security of Palestinians and Israelis alike.

The faltering two-State solution has created many challenges for the Palestinian people, and frustration has been rampant among Palestinians and Palestinian

factions, affecting their lives and their relations, especially given that it has been 23 years since the signing of the Oslo Accords, which called for the establishment of a Palestinian State within five years.

However, despite these challenges, Egypt recently succeeded in relaunching Palestinian reconciliation efforts. The legitimate Palestinian Government has returned to the Gaza Strip for the first time since 2007. This is clear recognition of the unity of all Palestinians, whether in the West Bank or in the Gaza Strip, under a single leadership that represents them and speaks on their behalf, a leadership that recognizes the State of Israel and is committed to negotiations and peaceful efforts as a way towards the two-State solution, despite all the challenges and despite the Israeli incursions into the territory of the future Palestinian State, including Jerusalem.

As we work together with our Palestinian brothers to seize the opportunity to reunify Palestinian territories under a legitimate leadership, I call on the international community, especially influential States, to seize this historic opportunity and to salvage the two-State solution through a comprehensive political vision that eschews piecemeal, temporary or palliative solutions, which have proved unsuccessful. I call on them to recognize the risks and consequences resulting from the failure of such a solution for the two peoples and the region as a whole.

In addition, in line with the call for peace and coexistence made by the President of Egypt in the General Assembly (see A/72/PV.5), I call on Palestinians and Israelis to realize that their two peoples will continue to live on that sacred land and that neither will go away. They must choose to either live and coexist based on equal rights and obligations or to succumb to one-upmanships and extreme positions that might serve certain parties one day, but would force the two peoples to suffer the dire consequences of illogic, incitement and hatred.

A settlement is not impossible, as some like to say. The resolutions of the United Nations since 1948, especially those of the Security Council, have established detailed parameters for a settlement based on international law and the Charter of the United Nations. Those resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative, which is considered a historic Initiative, endorsed by the Council in resolution 2334 (2016), prove that we can solve all issues only if there is a serious intention to do so. The resolutions of the United Nations have never imposed a solution on any party. They have, rather, set a framework for a final settlement, based on direct negotiations between the two parties.

In closing, I would like to reiterate our commitment to working together with Palestinians and Israelis and with all influential international Powers to reach a just settlement to the Palestinian question.

Mr. Allen (United Kingdom): I would like to thank Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs Jenča and, through him, Special Coordinator Mladenov for all of their work.

From the outset, I would like to make clear, as we approach the centenary of the Balfour Declaration next month, that the United Kingdom understands and respects the sensitivities many have about the Declaration and the events that have taken place in the region since 1917. The United Kingdom is proud to have played a role in helping to make a Jewish homeland a reality, and we continue to support the principle of such a homeland and the modern State of Israel.

Just as we fully support the modern State of Israel as a Jewish homeland, we also fully support the objective of a viable and sovereign Palestinian State. The occupation is a continued impediment to securing the political rights of the non-Jewish communities in Palestine. Let us remember that there are two halves to the Declaration — the second half of which has not been fulfilled. There is therefore unfinished business.

With the approaching centenary, we believe that it is important to look forward, not backward — forward towards establishing security and justice for both Israelis and Palestinians through a lasting peace. We believe that the way to achieve that lasting peace is through a negotiated two-State solution that leads to a safe and secure Israel living alongside a viable and sovereign Palestinian State, based on 1967 borders with agreed land swaps, Jerusalem as the shared capital of both States and a just, fair, agreed and realistic settlement for refugees.

We continue to watch developments on intra-Palestinian reconciliation closely. Our long-standing policy on reconciliation is that we support the Palestinian people in realizing self-determination through an independent, sovereign and unified Palestinian State encompassing the West Bank and Gaza.

We continue to closely monitor the situation in Gaza and we welcome Egyptian efforts on this important issue. We also join the Secretary-General in welcoming the Palestinian Authority's return to Gaza on 2 October and the agreement to allow the Palestinian Authority to resume administrative control. That is an important and positive step towards the full restoration of Palestinian Authority control and effective governance in Gaza.

We encourage those involved in the talks to engage in good faith so as to allow the Palestinian Authority to fully resume its Government functions and ensure compliance with the Quartet principles. Our policy on Hamas remains clear — Hamas must renounce violence, recognize Israel and accept previous agreements. We expect now to see credible movement towards those conditions, which remain the benchmark against which its intentions should be judged. We call on those in the region with influence over Hamas to encourage it to take these steps.

In support of the two-State solution, we must continue to press the parties on the need to refrain from actions that make peace efforts more difficult. We are clear that the repellent phenomena of terrorism and incitement pose a grave threat to the two-State solution and must end. We strongly condemn the use of racist, hateful and anti-Semitic language. It is right that we continue to urge against any type of action and language that makes it more difficult to achieve a culture of peaceful coexistence.

Settlement construction is a significant barrier to achieving the negotiated agreement we seek and seriously threatens the physical viability of the two-State solution. We have witnessed an unacceptable acceleration of settlements activity throughout 2017, both in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. To date, Israel has advanced plans over 13,000 settlement units — the highest number since 1992. Reports also indicate that a significant number of units may be advanced this week, and new settlement construction permits were approved in Hebron for the first time in 15 years. We condemn each of those illegal acts in the strongest terms.

Moving briefly to Iran, as we have heard, President Trump has taken the decision not to recertify Iran's compliance with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) to Congress. The United Kingdom stands committed to the JCPOA and its full implementation by all sides. We believe that preserving the JCPOA is in our shared national security interest. The nuclear deal was the culmination of 13 years of diplomacy, and was a major step towards ensuring that Iran's nuclear programme is not diverted for military purposes. The JCPOA was unanimously endorsed by the Council in resolution 2231 (2015).

The International Atomic Energy Agency has repeatedly confirmed Iran's compliance with the JCPOA through its long-term verification and monitoring programme. Therefore, we encourage careful consideration of the implications to the security of the United States and its allies before taking any steps that might undermine the JCPOA, such as reimposing sanctions on Iran that were lifted under the agreement.

As we work to preserve the JCPOA, we share concerns about Iran's ballistic missile programme and regional activities that also affect our security interests. We stand ready to take further appropriate measures to address these issues in close cooperation with the United States and all relevant partners. We also look to Iran to engage in constructive dialogue to stop destabilizing actions and work towards negotiated solutions. We believe that approach entails the best path to regional security.

Mr. Alemu (Ethiopia): I would like to thank Assistant Secretary-General Miroslav Jenča for his comprehensive briefing on the latest developments in the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

We are meeting today only a few days after the signing of the intra-Palestinian agreement, an encouraging development that we believe may be able to promote Palestinian unity and reconciliation. We appreciate Egypt's role in facilitating the signing of the agreement and are grateful for its noble efforts. We hope that the agreement's timely and effective implementation will be instrumental in enabling the Palestinian Authority to return to Gaza and help to improve the livelihoods of Palestinians there by addressing the humanitarian situation, which continues to be a source of major concern. In that regard, we take note of the discussions between the Secretary-General and the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process with the Palestinian leadership. There can be no question that the continued support and engagement of the international community, particularly the United Nations, will be crucial to the agreement's success.

As Mr. Jenča said, the implementation of the Cairo agreement will also be critical to the efforts to find a negotiated solution to the Israeli-Palestinian dispute. We take note of the high-level engagements made recently to facilitate a resumption of direct negotiations between the two parties. Needless to say, there are serious difficulties to be tackled in order to facilitate a credible political process aimed at a two-State solution, which is the only viable option for ending the long-standing Israeli-Palestinian dispute, and also the only viable way to ensure that security and justice for all can become a reality. But that is not impossible if the necessary political will is there. The same well-known obstacles to ending the impasse and achieving peace persist, with no movement forward to speak of, in a situation that is hardly conducive to sustainable peace and security for both countries. In the meantime, the quest for justice keeps being postponed, with all that that implies. Without genuine efforts to remove those obstacles, there can be no meaningful progress towards realizing a two-State solution.

We are also meeting at a time when the fight against terrorism in the region is making progress, with Da'esh losing a lot of ground in both Syria and Iraq. That has come at an enormous price, and everything should be done to preserve the recent gains that have been made, which is why it is important for the international community to remain focused on fighting terrorism in the region and to coordinate its efforts so as to further consolidate the gains and achieve lasting stability.

What is becoming increasingly self-evident is the degree to which the various challenges that we face in the Middle East, while seeming self-contained, are in fact interrelated, thereby demanding a peacemaking approach that is sensitive to their complexity so that security and justice for all can be assured. The Security Council must play an important role in all of that or recognize its failure to discharge its responsibilities.

Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan): We thank Mr. Miroslav Jenča, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his comprehensive update.

Kazakhstan's position on the Middle East peace process remains clear and unchanged. We support negotiations aimed at a two-State solution and urge for their resumption, as soon as possible and preferably in a bilateral format without preconditions. The ultimate goal should be the restoration and promotion of the peace process, in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions, the Madrid principles, the land-for-peace formula and the Quartet road map. We echo other delegations in emphasizing the importance of ending Israel's illegal settlement activities, which are clearly not helping to bring peace to the region and are violations of international law. We also believe that violence is counterproductive and will lead only to further confrontations between the parties.

We underscore the importance of achieving intra-Palestinian unity, and in that regard welcome the results of last week's talks in Cairo and acknowledge Egypt's commendable efforts as a bridge-builder. We hope that the Palestinian reconciliation agreement will contribute to the resumption and further advancement of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

On the humanitarian and economic fronts, Kazakhstan is particularly concerned about the grave situation in Palestine. The checkpoints imposed on Gaza only aggravate the socioeconomic and humanitarian situation and diminish the prospects for peace. It will be important to ensure that all the necessary measures are taken to improve Palestinians' economic situation, as outlined by the Secretary-General during his recent visit to Israel, Jordan and the Gaza Strip. We believe that such steps will make a major contribution to the security of both sides and create a platform conducive to peace negotiations. We therefore call for economic concessions to the Palestinians to be finalized in order to ease daily living conditions in the territory of the Palestinian Authority.

We welcome the progress made by the Government of Lebanon with its new electoral law, enacted by Parliament on 16 June, and hope the changes will ensure the holding of the free and fair parliamentary elections planned for May 2018. The Lebanese Armed Forces continue to serve their people with commitment, and their success against the threat of terrorism is well recognized. They and the country's security apparatus should be actively supported both technically and financially, including under the umbrella of the International Support Group for Lebanon.

Concerning Libya, Kazakhstan welcomes the United Nations action plan for resuming an inclusive political process facilitated and led by the United Nations, which was presented by Special Representative Salamé at a high-level event on Libya on 20 September. We are of the view that the Libyan Political Agreement remains the only viable framework to end the political

crisis, and that all international efforts to bring about an inclusive political dialogue among Libyans should be consolidated under the leadership of the United Nations.

On Yemen, we are deeply concerned about the deteriorating humanitarian situation and cholera epidemic in the country. Last week in this Chamber (see S/PV.8066) we heard about the horrific numbers of the humanitarian crisis, which is an entirely man-made one. If we are to avoid a humanitarian catastrophe and large-scale famine, effective strategies must be established, including a cessation of hostilities and a ceasefire, unhindered humanitarian access and the launch of a sustainable political agreement.

Lastly, Kazakhstan hopes that the efforts of the sponsors of the peace process, together with international and regional organizations and all the parties to the negotiations, can lead to a lasting and just peace in the Middle East.

Mr. Wu Haitao (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Assistant Secretary-General Jenča for his briefing.

The Palestinian question has been lingering for many years and is the crux of the crisis in the Middle East and one of the underlying causes of the problems in the region. Palestine and Israel are neighbours that share the same fate. Accelerating a political settlement of the Palestinian question through dialogue and consultation is in the fundamental interests of both the Palestinian and the Israeli peoples and will help to bring about durable peace and stability in the region.

The Palestinian-Israeli situation is currently very fragile. The conflict around the issue of settlements is still acute, and the humanitarian situation in Gaza is grave. The Palestinian people are demanding to see their historical wrongs corrected and to be able to exercise their inalienable national rights. The international community should ramp up its sense of urgency and agitate for a political settlement of the Palestinian question.

First, it should resolutely push for a two-State solution, which is the foundation for any political settlement process. Such a solution best fits the regional realities, is most widely recognized internationally and has been called for in General Assembly resolutions. The parties concerned should work diligently to resume the peace talks and seek a speedy, just, comprehensive and lasting solution to the Palestinian issue, based on the relevant Security Council resolutions, the principle of land for peace and the Arab Peace Initiative.

Secondly, we should adhere to the concept of common, integrated, cooperative and sustainable security and eliminate all the negative factors impeding the resumption of peace talks between Israel and Palestine. In that regard, China calls for the effective implementation of resolution 2334 (2016). The parties concerned should translate their words into action and demonstrate their full willingness to engage in peace talks, build mutual trust and cease all actions that undermine the possibility of a two-State solution. It will be essential to halt all settlement activities in the occupied territory and put an end to the closure of Gaza. Measures to improve the livelihood of the Palestinian people and to prevent violence against innocent civilians should be bolstered as soon as possible.

Thirdly, we should further coordinate the efforts of the international community and foster synergy for peace. China supports all efforts aimed at promoting peace between Palestine and Israel. The international community has been increasing its focus on the question of Palestine for some time now, and the parties concerned have, from different perspectives, at different levels and with different emphases, promoted the resumption of peace talks by actively engaging in various diplomatic activities.

Progress has recently has been made with intra-Palestine reconciliation, which should help to promote unity within Palestine, the resumption of peace talks, Palestine's achievement of independent statehood and peaceful coexistence between Palestine and Israel. China appreciates Egypt's efforts to promote such reconciliation. We hope that the international community will build on the progress made and further strengthen its coordination in order to take steps to promote peace through joint engagement as soon as possible.

China is a staunch supporter of the Palestinian people's just cause and an active mediator for peace between Israel and Palestine. We firmly support the concept of a two-State solution and the establishment of a Palestinian State with full sovereignty and independence, on the basis of the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. China will use President Xi Jinping's four-point proposal as its general guide for settling the Palestinian question and will work with the other parties involved for its political settlement.

China continues to believe that the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action on the Iran nuclear question has helped to defuse the Iranian nuclear crisis and strengthen the nuclear non-proliferation regime, with the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons as its cornerstone. It is an important result for international security, governance and multilateralism and a good example of the effectiveness of addressing difficult issues through diplomatic and political means. We hope the parties concerned will work together to maintain and safeguard the Plan of Action as a historic achievement, and that they will honour their respective obligations under the agreement, ensure its comprehensive execution and implementation and settle their differences appropriately through dialogue and consultation in a concerted effort to preserve peace and stability in the Middle East.

Mr. Rosselli (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening today's open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, and I thank the Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Mr. Miroslav Jenča, for his detailed briefing.

When we are at the end of the list of speakers, I always find that a previous speaker has used some idea or expression that I wanted to use. In this case, my dear colleague the Ambassador of Japan started with the exact opening sentence that I wanted. This is the last time that Uruguay, as a non-permanent member of the Security Council, will take the floor on this topic. We plan to return to the Council for the period 2034-2035, 17 years from now. We hope that by that time, when we return to the Security Council, we will see a peaceful and democratic Middle East whose peoples are living together and cooperating in solidarity, regardless of their pasts and their religions, united in enjoying a decent life in which their human rights are fully exercised and prioritized.

Until then, however, we have to live with a reality that shows no prospects whatever for improvement. On the contrary, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict has continued, month after month, as the most significant conflict affecting the region. However, in recent years, in addition to that long-unresolved dispute, armed conflicts and humanitarian crises of enormous impact in Syria, Iraq and Yemen have emerged and have totally destabilized the region, with unavoidable global consequences. Perhaps one day the Council will have the political will to prevent such catastrophes more effectively and tackle their root causes. As that is not yet possible, we have to play our part by attempting to stop these crises as quickly as possible and design effective processes for providing humanitarian assistance and political solutions to them.

The Council's history with regard to the Middle East has not exactly been a series of success stories. Indeed, it has encountered serious difficulties thanks to multiple factors that include non-compliance with Council resolutions by the Governments of the region and the other groups they are dealing with, as well as ongoing violations of international law, in terms both of international humanitarian law and the human rights of the populations involved, who have already suffered too much. However, that should not lead us to throw up our hands in despair but rather to redouble our efforts to achieve our objectives.

Just one day after our most recent meeting on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict (see S/PV.8011), terrorism claimed the lives of three Israeli victims who fell at the hands of a Palestinian attacker. As we have done on previous occasions, we firmly condemn that attack. Violence will never lead to peace; it will only make it more difficult to achieve a two-State solution. It is worrying that the President of the Palestinian Authority, Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, confirmed at the beginning of the month that he will continue to pay the families of terrorists. Once again, we reiterate our condemnation of incitement to violence and its glorification.

We also categorically reject the Israeli leadership's explicit support for the settlement policy, which continues to move full steam ahead, despite the provisions of resolution 2334 (2016) and the persistent remonstrations of Mr. Mladenov and the international community. We emphasize the full legitimacy of resolution 242 (1967) and the principle that seizing land by force is unacceptable. We emphasize that the settlements are illegal under international law and constitute a serious obstacle to peace and a two-State solution. The settlement policy is also supported by constant demolitions of Palestinian housing in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Such actions clearly do not contribute to defusing tensions. There are other necessary gestures and measures that we have not seen so far.

As it has done since the adoption of General Assembly resolution 181 (II), in 1947, Uruguay reaffirms its unfailing support for the right of Israel

and Palestine to live in peace, within secure and recognized borders, in a atmosphere of restored cooperation free from any threat or act damaging to peace. We also reiterate our support for a solution based on the existence of two independent States, which we firmly believe is the only option that will enable Israel and Palestine to peacefully coexist. In that regard, Uruguay once again points out that it is essential that direct negotiations between the two parties be resumed. If that is to be done, the current trends on the ground must be reversed, or it will be extremely difficult for the Palestinians to consolidate the territory of their State. We regret the fact that no progress has been made on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016), almost 10 months after its adoption.

We thank and commend the Arab Republic of Egypt for its efforts leading to the signing on 12 October of a reconciliation agreement between the Palestinian groups Hamas and Fatah, which is an important step towards achieving Palestinian unity. In that context, we commend the return of the Palestinian Authority's control over the Gaza Strip after a decade of absence. Palestine's reunification under a single, legitimate and democratic Government is essential to addressing the aspirations of its people and enabling it to substantially improve living conditions in Gaza, whose worrying situation could deteriorate into a serious humanitarian crisis at any moment. For the agreement to be successfully implemented, its measures should be supported by agreements on security, the disarming of Hamas and the renunciation of policies of violence and the destruction of Israel as declared objectives.

I would like to briefly mention the conflict in Syria. While the Astana peace process has led to a decrease in violence in some areas of the country, September was one of the most deadly months of the year in terms of victims, with more than 3,000 deaths. We are still witnessing sieges, starvation, indiscriminate attacks on civilians, the use of chemical weapons, terrorist attacks and gross violations of human rights and international humanitarian law.

We are very pleased with the recent progress in the fight against the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and other terrorist organizations. However, we reiterate that only a Syrian-led political transition process, mediated by the United Nations in accordance with the road map outlined in resolution 2254 (2015), will make it possible to end this horrible war.

We should take a moment to discuss the situation in Yemen. The armed conflict and paralysed peace process continue to cause the Yemeni people great suffering. The violence must end immediately. Both parties to the conflict should return to the negotiating table without further delay and resume dialogue under the auspices of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen, without preconditions and in good faith. They must agree to end the armed conflict. It is also vital for countries that have influence over the parties concerned to collaborate in the quest for a peaceful solution to the conflict. The devastating war has left the world's poorest Arab country on the brink of humanitarian collapse and famine, and enduring a cholera epidemic that is wreaking additional havoc. Yemen's people are desperately seeking the help of the international community. Who will restore the lives of these thousands of children, men and women, young and old, or heal the damage caused by such a bloodthirsty conflict? We reiterate that those responsible for the abhorrent atrocities committed in Yemen — both those who pull the trigger and those providing logistical assistance — must sooner or later be brought to justice.

With regard to Iraq and the possible destabilizing effects of the recent referendum on independence in Kurdistan, we emphasize that Iraq's sovereignty, territorial integrity and unity are paramount. The progress made in the fight against terrorism must be consolidated. We cannot permit those achievements to be jeopardized by the possibility of sectarianism dividing the country once again. Iraq must move forward on its path to peace and stability.

Lastly, let me briefly mention of the situation in Lebanon. In August, the Council renewed the mandate of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon with the primary goal of strengthening its role and enabling it to have a more proactive and visible presence on the ground in order to detect possible threats to peace and stability along the Blue Line and in the south of Lebanon. In the coming year it will be essential to count on an ongoing assessment of the mission's capabilities and weaknesses so that it can identify ways to fulfil its mandate more effectively and avoid any incidents in such a sensitive area.

The President (*spoke in French*): I shall now make a statement in my national capacity as the representative of France.

I would like to begin by thanking Assistant Secretary-General Miroslav Jenča for his very informative briefing. The perspective he has presented reminds us of a reality to which France has always tried to draw the Security Council's attention: in a region that has been shaken by major crises for years, the oldest conflict in the Middle East has still not been resolved. Time has not made the Israeli-Palestinian conflict less dangerous. Far from being an acceptable status quo, the situation on the ground has been deteriorating every day, particularly thanks to the Israeli settlements, which create circumstances capable of degenerating into a genuine crisis at any time. That has been a regular occurrence in the past few years, including recently in relation to the Al-Aqsa Mosque. Year after year, the notion of peace has faded in people's words and minds as successive generations of Palestinians and Israelis have lost all hope of peaceful coexistence. Nor have the increasing numbers of regional crises marginalized or trivialized the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. They have increased its potential for destabilization and made its resolution more necessary than ever. Because of its gravity, its central position in the Middle East, its symbolic dimension and its place in the collective imagination, the conflict has a profoundly destabilizing influence whose scope goes far beyond the borders of Israel and the Palestinian territories. Any escalation of the conflict carries with it the risk of uncontrollable consequences in the region, and its persistence creates a platform for recruitment to the terrorist groups that are active in the region, which we should be especially wary of.

We must come to grips with the fact that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will not resolve itself on its own. It will not be settled through the inertia of its principal actors or by way of illusory shortcuts. The only avenue is the difficult path towards peace based on mutual respect and negotiation. For while the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the oldest of those that have torn the Middle East apart, it is also the only one whose solution is fully understood and agreed upon within the international community. Despite the constant deterioration of the situation on the ground, the parameters of a future agreement have not changed. They still require two States living in peace and security within secure and recognized frontiers, drawn on the basis of the pre-1967 borders, with a mutually agreed-on exchange of land, with Jerusalem as the capital of both States and including an agreed, realistic, just and lasting solution for Palestinian refugees.

There is no alternative to a two-State solution and the vision of a region with two democratic States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side. The destinies of the two peoples are intertwined. Neither State can sustainably satisfy its national aspirations by denying those of the other. But the colonization of the Palestinian territories is imposing a different reality on the ground. It is expanding at a pace unequalled since 1967, and ultimately threatens to create a one-State reality in which two citizenship regimes coexist, an unequal situation that would therefore be both unacceptable on principle and produce disastrous consequences.

Violence is already recurring on the ground, as was shown by the attack that left three dead at the entrance of a West Bank settlement towards the end of September. To be clear, we firmly condemn violence and every kind of incitement to violence, which is also required under resolution 2334 (2016). In an already volatile environment, further settlement risks increasing tension.

With nearly 600,000 settlers in East Jerusalem and the West Bank, we are approaching the point of no return. In this year alone, Israeli authorities have approved the construction of 12,000 new housing units — three times more than last year. In the past few days, the construction of new housing in the centre of Hebron was approved for the first time in 15 years. Yesterday, 1,300 new housing units were approved in the West Bank, the majority of those in settlements deep into the West Bank, which is far from compatible with a future peace agreement. Just today, the approval of more than 1,300 additional units was announced.

Faced with such developments, France's position is clear. We condemn the construction of settlements, which is not only illegal under international law, as recalled in resolution 2334 (2016), but is also dangerous, because it destroys the possibility of a two-State solution, both politically and on the ground. Moreover, from a practical point of view, we are implementing a differentiation policy between Israel, with which we hope to continue and deepen our discussions, and the occupied territories. Within the framework of the European Union, that approach is reflected in provisions that exclude Israeli settlements from the benefits of the agreements that we have signed with Israel, as well as in specific recommendations on identifying the origin of goods from those settlements. Let us be clear, however, that distinction, which is also called for under resolution 2334 (2016), is in no way related, either

directly or indirectly, to any kind of boycott. I reiterate once again that France will remain extremely firm in its refusal and condemnation of appeals to boycott Israel.

Beyond the violence that we are already seeing on the ground, which we condemn, settlement activity presents a double impasse — for the Palestinians that constitutes the failure of their aspirations to become a State, and for the Israelis the ruin of their national democratic project.

Finally, while preserving the continuity of the Palestinian territories is essential for a future agreement on their final status, Palestinian political and territorial unity is equally as important for such an agreement to be viable. For the past decade, we have called on the Palestinians to end the division between Gaza and the West Bank and once again become unified, under the authority of President Mahmoud Abbas and within the framework of the principles endorsed by the Palestine Liberation Organization: non-violence, the recognition of Israel and respect for signed agreements.

The agreement signed in Cairo on 12 October by Fatah and Hamas, preceded by a visit by the Palestinian Authority Government to Gaza 10 days earlier, is an encouraging development in that direction. That result could not have been reaached without the considerable and continuing efforts made by Egypt, which we would like to commend. The discussions under way should enable the Palestinian Authority to fully exercise its prerogatives in the Gaza Strip, including in the area of security. It must also put an end to the energy crisis as quickly as possible, of which the population of Gaza is the only victim. Finally, through appropriate security arrangements, it must facilitate the lifting of the blockade imposed on the people of Gaza.

France is a friend to both Palestinians and Israelis. That is why we must speak plainly with them and tirelessly call on them to return to the negotiating table. In that regard, we want to continue to work with our main partners. With our partners in the European Union, we remain engaged to help resume negotiations by using all of our collective tools. France associates itself with the statement to be delivered shortly on behalf of the European Union.

As for the region, the Arab Peace Initiative remains an essential framework for making peace with the Palestinians the first step towards Israel's regional integration, which will benefit all. We hope that the commitment of the United States Administration in its new diplomatic effort will help to reignite a dynamic of negotiation between the parties, within the framework of international law and with the objective of the two-State solution. As a friend of the Palestinians and the Israelis, France cannot resign itself to a situation that leaves either party at an impasse. It is high time to put an end to that.

I now resume my functions as the President of the Council.

I would remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than four minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously. Delegations with lengthy statements are kindly requested to circulate their texts in writing and deliver a condensed version when speaking in the Chamber.

I wish to inform all concerned that we will be carrying on today's open debate right through the lunch hour, as we have a large number of speakers.

I now give the floor to the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

Mr. Moncada (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): It is an honour for the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to take the floor on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned countries at this quarterly open debate on a topic to which we have historically attached particular importance — the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

First of all, we would like to convey our gratitude to Mr. Miroslav Jenča, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his valuable briefing.

Against the backdrop of the ongoing critical situation and diminishing prospects for peace, the Non-Aligned Movement takes this opportunity to reaffirm its abiding solidarity with the Palestinian people and its unwavering support for their just cause, while renewing its commitment to further strengthen and coordinate efforts to promote a just, lasting, comprehensive and peaceful solution to the Palestinian question in all its aspects, including the achievement of justice and the rights of the Palestinian people — an objective that remains a priority on the Movement's agenda.

The principled positions of the Movement in relation to the question of Palestine were clearly reaffirmed almost a month ago, on 19 September, when the Ministerial Committee of the Non-Aligned Movement on Palestine issued a political declaration

of support and solidarity with the Palestinian people, which was later endorsed by consensus by the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the Movement.

Moreover, the member States of the Movement reaffirm that the ongoing Israeli occupation and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict as a whole continue to pose a serious threat to international peace and security, which requires urgent attention and a solution, in accordance with international law, the relevant United Nations resolutions and, of course, the Charter of the United Nations itself. In that regard, the Movement stands ready to contribute to the achievement of a just, lasting and peaceful solution, and we call for the intensification of international and regional efforts in support of that goal, while recalling the responsibilities of the Security Council and of the General Assembly in that regard, as was most recently reaffirmed in resolution 2334 (2016), which was wholeheartedly welcomed and supported by the Movement.

We believe that the resolution provides the most viable path, setting forth the requirements and parameters for a just solution that would safeguard the two-State solution along the 1967 lines and create the necessary conditions to end the occupation, justly resolve the conflict in all its aspects and make Palestinian-Israeli peace and security a reality. In addition, the Movement continues to call for the resolution to be fully respected and implemented, while stressing that it remains central to redressing the situation on the ground, de-escalating tensions and fostering an appropriate environment for the pursuit of peace. In that regard, we reiterate the need for a substantive written report to be presented regarding the implementation of the resolution, in order to support the Council's duties and ensure proper documentation of the implementation of the resolution's provisions, especially in the light of Israel's continued disregard of the Security Council and its violation of its legally binding resolutions.

The Non-Aligned Movement expresses its grave concern regarding recent developments in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. In particular, the Movement is concerned about the ongoing, escalating policies and measures by Israel, the occupying Power, aimed at expanding its illegal settlements campaign and to continue to consolidate its half-century of invasion and occupation of Palestinian land and its violation of the rights of the Palestinian people.

Rather than ceasing its violations, reversing the negative trends on the ground and demonstrating its commitment to the two-State solution on the basis of the pre-1967 lines, as demanded by the Security Council and the international community as a whole, Israel continues to act with contempt for the Council and in breach of its legal obligations. In that regard, member States of the Movement strongly condemn the recent provocative decisions of Israel, the occupying Power, to proceed with its settlement activities in grave breach of international law and of the relevant United Nations resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016). Moreover, we are alarmed by and deeply deplore the flagrant contempt of Israel, the occupying Power, for the unequivocal decision by the Security Council in that regard, which clearly reaffirmed that Israel's settlement activities have no legal validity and that they constitute a flagrant violation of international law. That resolution also calls on Israel to immediately and completely cease all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and to fully respect all of its legal obligations, including under the Fourth Geneva Convention.

We must also once again warn of the high risk for further deterioration and destabilization, as witnessed recently in occupied East Jerusalem due to provocative and illegal Israeli actions in the Old City and at Haram Al-Sharif, which houses the Al-Aqsa Mosque, including attempts to undermine the historic status quo at the holy site, which dramatically raised tensions and inflamed religious sensitivities. Those practices must stop in order, among other things, to ensure Palestinian freedom of access and worship, as well as to ensure full respect for the sanctity of all the holy sites and to avert any further destabilization.

The situation in Gaza continues to elicit great concern for the Movement, in particular the grave humanitarian situation. In that regard, the Movement reiterates its call for the complete lifting of the more than 10-year-long Israeli blockade of the Gaza Strip, while also stressing that the crisis in Gaza must be comprehensively addressed in accordance with international law, including humanitarian law and human rights law, and in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions in the context of the overall situation of the continuation of the illegitimate, belligerent Israeli foreign occupation of Palestinian territory since 1967, including East Jerusalem, and

of the unequivocal calls for an end to a half-century of occupation.

Moreover, the Non-Aligned Movement welcomes recent steps being taken towards Palestinian reconciliation, including the signing of the unity agreement between the Palestinian Authority and Hamas on 12 October, and expresses its full and resolute support for efforts aimed at ensuring Palestinian unity and the effective functioning of a Palestinian national consensus government in Gaza.

Next month will mark another sombre anniversary for the question of Palestine: the seventieth anniversary of the General Assembly's decision to split Mandated Palestine via its adoption of resolution 181 (II), of 29 November 1947. In that regard, the member States of the Movement reiterate their calls for the intensification of international efforts aimed at achieving, without further delay, an end to the Israeli occupation that began in 1967 and a just, lasting, comprehensive and peaceful solution, while reiterating the Movement's readiness to cooperate and support all relevant efforts in line with the decisions taken during the seventeenth Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement on Margarita Island.

The Movement of Non-Aligned Countries reaffirms that all measures and actions taken by Israel, the occupying Power, such as its illegal decision of 14 December 1981, which purports to alter the legal, geographical and demographic status of the occupied Syrian Golan and its institutional structure, in addition to Israel's measures to apply its jurisdiction and administration there, are null and void and have no legal effect. In that regard, in line with our principled position, we demand once again that Israel abide by resolution 497 (1981) and withdraw fully from the occupied Syrian Golan to the lines of 4 June 1967, in accordance with resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

In addition member States of the Movement emphasize the need for Israel to withdraw from all Lebanese territories, including the Sheba'a farms land, the Kfar Shuba Hiils and the Lebanese part of Ghajar Village, up until behind the Blue Line, in accordance with the relevant international resolutions, and in particular resolution 1701 (2006).

In conclusion, the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries avails itself of this opportunity to reiterate its appeal to the States Members of the Organization to redouble current efforts aimed at overcoming the continued financial shortfalls of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East with a view to ensuring adequate, sufficient, predictable and sustained funding for the Agency for the duration of its mandate so it can fully meet the needs of Palestinian refugees and thereby fulfil is humanitarian mission. In that regard, we underscore the need to continue providing political, economic and humanitarian support to assist the Palestinian people and to bolster their resilience and efforts aimed at achieving their legitimate national aspirations, including their inalienable right to self-determination and freedom in their independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Lebanon.

Mr. Salam (Lebanon) (*spoke in French*): How many Security Council meetings have been dedicated to the situation in my region since I took office as the Permanent Representative of Lebanon in 2007? How many times have we witnessed the deterioration of peace prospects in the Middle East despite so many good intentions, including the commendable efforts of France?

I have watched closely, and often with indignation, the growing feelings of injustice and disappointment fuelled by three deadly wars in Gaza, an unprecedented intensification of the occupation and a plethora of initiatives for negotiations that would never come to pass. All that is in addition to the underlying wounded memory that seems increasingly difficult to heal and that leads to the sad radicalization of minds. Despite this lugubrious reality, we must not fail to welcome the Palestinian reconciliation agreement reached last week, which rightly revives a certain hope. In that regard, it is also appropriate to thank Egypt for its sustained mediation efforts.

Yet how can that hope be translated into reality when the Israeli authorities continue their relentless pursuit of colonization, which, it should be recalled, is illegal under international law? Simply note Israel's approval of new construction in Hebron, a first in 15 years. That should be resolutely condemned by the Council without further delay. That expansionist policy, which has lasted more than half a century, was summarized by Ariel Sharon in the following terms:

> "Everybody has to move, run and grab as many hilltops as they can to enlarge the settlements;

> because everything we take now will stay ours. Everything we do not grab will go to them".

There is no need to repeat that, as long as the Security Council remains a prisoner of its inability to put an end to those flagrant violations, we will move further away from the two-State solution, with the greatest contempt for the relevant resolutions adopted by this organ.

Before turning to Lebanon, with your indulgence, Madam President, I would like to remind the downtrodden Palestinian people, in this difficult time, of these words from General de Gaulle:

> "[a]t the end of our sorrow, there is the greatest glory of the world, that of the men who did not give in".

As for Lebanon, my Government remains deeply committed to the full implementation of resolution 1701 (2006). In that regard, the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon has demonstrated that it is carrying out its thorny mission, and we reiterate our full confidence in it. Its mission is all the more important because the environment remains exacting. Not one day passes without Israel violating my country's sovereignty, or its leaders bombarding it with incessant threats, which is in direct violation of the provisions of resolution 1701 (2006). I would like to recall that those violations and repeated threats have been duly recorded in letters sent by the Lebanese Mission to the Security Council. It is high time that the Council shoulder its onerous responsibility and ensure that the rules and principles of international law are upheld in order to put an end to such acts.

Could the Council not at least swiftly condemn the unspeakable remarks of Naftali Bennet, Israeli Minister of Education, who, after threatening to send Lebanon back to the Middle Ages, now threatens to attack "the infrastructure, the international airport and the Government institutions" of my country? I repeat that those remarks were made by Israel's Education Minister.

It has now been more than 10 years since the General Assembly adopted a resolution, by an overwhelming majority, calling upon Israel to shoulder its responsibility and compensate my country for the oil spill it caused in 2006 when it bombed the Jiyeh power plant. My country has been treated unjustly. Peace and security cannot be maintained if States are not held to account for the damage they cause. It is in that spirit that we again call upon the Council to act without further delay to compel Israel to fulfil its responsibilities.

With regard to Syria, Lebanon welcomes the considerable reduction in violence since the signing of the memorandum on the creation of de-escalation zones last May in Astana. We support the efforts of the co-sponsors of the process to maintain the ceasefire and facilitate humanitarian access throughout Syria. The international community must also consolidate progress on the ground and support the efforts of Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura to resume negotiations in Geneva in order to reach a political solution to the crisis, pursuant to the relevant Security Council resolutions. The solution must take into account the aspirations of the Syrian people to live in peace and dignity in a sovereign and unified country. That will pave the way for a viable reconstruction process and for millions of refugees and internally displaced persons to return to their homes.

To conclude what could be my last statement as the Permanent Representative of Lebanon to the Security Council, I can only hope that the Council will finally, and without delay, shoulder its responsibilities, as outlined in the Charter of the United Nations, and allow a genuine opportunity for fair and lasting peace to be achieved.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Brazil.

Mr. Mauro Vieira (Brazil) (*spoke in French*): I thank France for convening today's meeting.

I will deliver an abridged version of my statement. The full text of the statement will be available for circulation.

We welcome new developments towards the political reunification of the State of Palestine, in particular the agreement signed in Cairo on 12 October and steps taken to extend the authority of the Government of National Consensus to the Gaza Strip. We encourage Palestinian political groups to continue their dialogue. However, we remain concerned about the continued expansion of illegal settlements in the occupied territories and about discussions on the amendment of the Basic Law: Jerusalem, Capital of Israel, adopted by Israel in 1980 and negated by resolution 478 (1980). It is imperative to avoid other unilateral actions that could impede the peace process.

Brazil reiterates its full commitment to the two-State solution, with Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace and security, within internationally recognized and mutually agreed boundaries and on the basis of the pre-1967 lines, with East Jerusalem as the capital of the State of Palestine. We recall the fundamental responsibility of the Council to support the resumption of direct negotiations between the parties.

Brazil welcomes the Security Council's decision to extend the mandate of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). We acknowledge the constructive engagement of France and Italy in negotiations to ensure the continuity of the essential elements of the Force's mandate. The international community must fully appreciate UNIFIL's contribution to the stability of Lebanon. The Force's Maritime Task Force has played a valuable role in preventing arms trafficking to non-State actors in Lebanon and in training the Lebanese Naval Forces. It must continue to have the means necessary to carry out its tasks. We hope that the Council will continue to give its full support to UNIFIL and take into consideration the views of the Government of Lebanon and the troop-contributing countries in its next mandate renewal.

Brazil is also concerned about the plight of Syrian and Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. While acknowledging the hospitality, generosity and spirit of tolerance that permeates Lebanese democracy, we underscore the need to strengthen international cooperation in order to assist those people. It is vital to provide funding for contingency plans drawn up by multilateral agencies for use in the field; improve the social and economic conditions of host communities; promote refugee resettlement initiatives; and ensure their right to return.

Our country has done its part by hosting thousands of refugees affected by the conflict in Syria. Our new migration law will establish a humanitarian visa for travel to Brazil, which will be granted to stateless persons and nationals of countries plagued by instability, armed conflict, disasters or serious violations of human rights law or international humanitarian law. We encourage other countries to take steps to host refugees from conflicts in the Middle East and reduce current pressure on nearby developing countries, such as Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey.

Turning now to the conflict in Syria, we welcome the finalization of parameters for the implementation of four de-escalation zones that emerged from the Astana process. We must now ensure that efforts under way to address the security dimension of the crisis lead to tangible progress towards a political solution based on resolution 2254 (2015). We welcome the ongoing liberation of areas previously occupied by Da'esh in eastern Syria, but underscore the imperative to respect international humanitarian law in such offensives.

In addition, with regard to the fight against terrorism, we note an increase in the number of letters submitted to the Security Council to justify the use of military action for counter-terrorism purposes under Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations. It is essential that those letters provide sufficient information concerning attacks in which legitimate self-defence is invoked, which will allow for proportionality and need for the use of force to be assessed. To enhance transparency, Brazil suggests that all such communications be listed on the Security Council's website. We note with interest the ongoing discussions on measures to promote reconstruction and economic recovery in Syria. It is important to create conditions that allow for the dignified voluntary return of refugees and internally displaced persons.

Finally, I would like to say a word about Iran. Brazil joins with many other countries that support the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action on the Iranian nuclear programme. It is a solid multilateral framework, which was legally adopted by resolution 2231 (2015) and plays a key role in stabilizing the Middle East and in implementing the non-proliferation regime.

Brazil has long believed that the establishment of a zone free of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East would contribute to peace in the region. We are adding to that traditional position a new legal instrument for promoting a nuclear-free world — the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, which Brazil was the first country to sign. We encourage all countries to accede to the Treaty, and we warmly congratulate the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, our partner in the process, on its having been awarded the 2017 Nobel Peace Prize.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Khoshroo (Islamic Republic of Iran): I convey my delegation's appreciation to the French presidency

for convening this open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine.

I align myself with the statement made on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

The Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands is central to every conflict in the Middle East. That injustice has continued for more than seven decades and has been exacerbated by Israeli expansionism and aggressive policies towards Palestinians and the whole region. Attempts by the United States to exclude the issue from the Security Council's agenda serves no other purpose than to ignore the suffering of the Palestinian people resulting from Israeli suppression and occupation — the most prolonged tragic situation, supported by the United States in the Middle East.

The entirety of Israeli history begins with the illegal occupation of Palestinian land and unchecked aggression against its neighbours and other countries in the Middle East — on at least 14 occasions since 1948. That regime arrogantly and flagrantly continues to violate at least 86 Council resolutions, from resolution 54 (1948) to 2334 (2016). Those violations have taken place with the total impunity that the regime continues to enjoy. Israel also continues to flout all international regimes governing weapons of mass destruction by refusing to adhere to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, the Biological Weapons Convention and the Chemical Weapons Convention. The nuclear weapons in the hands of the regime represent the most serious threat to the security of every State in the Middle East.

Although the Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands certainly is the main source of instability in the Middle Ease, there are other contributors. Foreign intervention, occupation and its consequent instability and attempts to engineer societies in the Middle East have created breeding grounds for terrorism, terrorists and extremist groups. Those groups, which initially received support from the United States and its allies, have been transformed into the monsters that now threaten those who once supported and created them. The United States tries to give the wrong attribution when it comes to the root causes of insecurity in the Middle East. As our Supreme Leader emphasized only today, we will not waste our time replying to rants of a brute nature.

We have not neglected the serious crises affecting the region, and, on numerous occasions, have proposed plans to end armed conflicts. Unfortunately, almost every one of our proposals, including initiating a forum for regional dialogue, has fallen on deaf ears. However, those crises are perpetuated by those willing to spend their dollars on beautiful American military equipment. Military equipment and weapons targeting women and children in Yemen are not beautiful. Beauty, rather, lies in the eyes of the innocent children who are being killed.

I am most confident to say that no country has done more than Iran in combating Da'esh in the region. If we had hegemonic ambitions, the nuclear deal would never have been reached. The new United States Administration's approach and the recent dangerous strategy adopted with regard to the deal and Iran run counter to the will of the international community. We are witnessing today a United States that is more isolated globally than ever before, while the good-faith nature of Iran's policies and positions has become apparent to the international community.

In conclusion, with regard to the Middle East, I should say that the right approach is not difficult to find. It requires a willingness to engage and search for peace and justice with regard to the long-standing problem of the Palestinian issue in the Middle East.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Indonesia.

Mr. Djani (Indonesia): Let me first congratulate France for once again raising this important issue within the framework of an open debate of the Security Council on the Middle East.

We also wish to align ourselves with the statement made by the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, and that to be made by the representative of Cuba on behalf of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. We also thank Mr. Miroslav Jenča, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his briefing.

Indonesia is pleased to welcome the landmark agreement reached last week by the leaders of Hamas and Fatah. We believe that a united Palestine will further strengthen their struggle to achieve a peaceful settlement to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through a two-State solution. As a consistent advocate of the Palestinian cause, Indonesia has always urged unity among all Palestinians in order to enable them to confront their common issues together. The agreement is an essential step towards the full reunification of

the West Bank and Gaza, and keeps alive prospects for the peaceful emergence of a Palestinian State. We appreciate Egypt's role in that regard. The agreement is of tremendous interest in Indonesia, where it was warmly welcomed by all our people. Indonesia commends the leadership of the Palestinian people and celebrates Palestinian unity.

Indonesia once again reiterates its call upon members of the international community to fulfil their obligation to push for peace in the Middle East by playing their due parts, just as the Palestinian leadership did last week by coming together. That call is of particular importance in the context of the Security Council, in view of fulfilling its responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security.

It has always been of grave concern to Indonesia that the Palestinian-Israeli conflict has needlessly gone on for too long in the history of humankind, with unhappy implications for generations of children who have found it difficult to lead normal lives. We reiterate that the time has come to end that conflict, while recalling the pivotal adoption of resolution 2334 (2016), of December 2016, and once again calling for its full implementation. In the resolution's wisdom of casting its vision upon the road to peace, the Council rejected Israel's establishment of settlements in Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, while categorically condemning them as illegal and a flagrant violation of international law. Settlements continue to be a major obstacle to the achievement of the two-State solution and a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

We therefore express our dismay that, as of this open debate, States Members of the United Nations have not received a substantive report from the Secretary-General, as stipulated by the resolution, detailing its implementation. In effect, three of those quarterly reports have yet to be forwarded.

My delegation recalls that, merely months following the adoption of resolution 2334 (2016), the Government of Israel announced the construction of the first new settlement in the West Bank in two decades. That policy derailed the authority of the Council, in particular with regard to the substance of resolution 2334 (2016). A failure by the United Nations to take measures in its implementation and to report diligently when expected at the due time can only serve to yield to Israel misplaced confidence in the error of its ways and encourage it to continue to undermine the just and lasting solution envisaged in the two-State solution.

On Yemen, Indonesia sees no other way to arrive at a solution to the conflict except through a Yemeni-led negotiation process, in which all the parties involved participate in an inclusive, peaceful and democratic manner. There is no military solution to the conflict. The lack of concrete results in the peace process continues to create suffering for Yemeni civilians, causing great damage every day to the humanitarian situation in Yemen, which is aggravated by famine and the outbreak of cholera. Indonesia emphatically urges the parties to return to the negotiating table in good faith so as to ensure a peaceful settlement.

On Syria, Indonesia underscores that the Astana process and other regional initiatives launched in the recent months to end local hostilities have led to a considerable reduction in the level of fighting in the country, through the implementation of various de-escalation zones. We underline the need to preserve the unity and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic. What is further needed is reconstruction and rehabilitation, as well as to ensure the safety and well-being of civilians in Syria. Indonesia highly appreciates the activities of the humanitarian personnel of the United Nations stationed in Syria, namely, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the World Health Organization, as well as of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent.

I would like to once again emphasize that Indonesia will never waver from its commitment to supporting the Palestinian struggle for independence as a true partner in the efforts to find a peaceful solution to sustaining peace in the Middle East. Nevertheless, I would like to end by posing a question to the Chamber, namely, How many more open debates do we need to have on the issue of Palestine before there is progress on the ground? Life is at stake.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Peru.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): Peru welcomes the convening of this quarterly open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. We are grateful for the valuable briefing made by Mr. Miroslav Jenča, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs.

The treatment afforded to the sensitive issue of the Palestinian question in a forum such as this usually leads to actions on the ground that undermine the expected two-State solution. The serious deterioration of the humanitarian situation in Gaza and the various terrorist acts tend to be the focus of our attention in debates such as this. On this occasion, however, we appreciate the commitment to intra-Palestinian reconciliation agreed to in recent days, under the auspices of Egypt, which we hope will further the peace process between Israel and Palestine. We hope that such agreement will make it possible for the Government of National Consensus to resume its responsibilities in the Gaza Strip and be better able to meet the pressing humanitarian needs of its population, particularly in the provision of basic services. We also ohpe that it will lay the foundation for the reunification of Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, under the control of a legitimate and democratic Palestinian Government. We furthermore expect that the agreement, by having a positive impact on security conditions, will pave the way for the gradual elimination of restrictions on the movement of goods and people to and from Gaza. For that purpose, a definitive renunciation of the use of violence and a recognition of the existence of the State of Israel are imperative.

In that context, it is necessary to lend a renewed sense of urgency to the efforts of the international community to promote direct negotiations between the parties in order to achieve the two-State solution — two States living side by side in conditions of peace and mutual recognition. In that regard, Peru encourages and supports the more visible commitment being undertaken by the Quartet, the renewed support for the Arab Peace Initiative in Amman, the good offices deployed by various European States, the efforts of the United States and the very praiseworthy efforts of Egypt in the name of peace. We also highlight the personal commitment expressed by Secretary-General António Guterres during his first official visit to the region of helping the parties to resume meaningful negotiations.

Peru, a country committed to multilateralism and the development of international law, attaches the utmost importance to compliance with resolutions adopted by the Security Council, such as resolution 2334 (2016), which calls upon Israel to cease its settlement practices, demolition of homes and evictions in the territories occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem. Peru notes with concern the reports provided by Mr. Mladenov regarding the intensification of those practices throughout the year. Such practices seriously endanger the territorial integrity of the Palestinian State and make the two-State solution increasingly distant. Moreover, in accordance with the provisions of resolution 2334 (2016), we reiterate the call to all parties directly involved to put an end to acts of violence, human rights abuses and inflammatory rhetoric, which exacerbate feelings and deepens resentment.

In that regard, Peru recognizes the inalienable right of Israel to safeguard its own security and existence by exercising legitimate self-defence, in accordance with the principles of proportionality and lawfulness. Since 1947, when Peru was part of the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine, we have maintained an unchanging and clear position on the issue. We support the solution of two States living within secure and mutually recognized borders as a basis for peaceful coexistence.

Along those lines, during its forthcoming participation as a non-permanent member of the Council during 2018 and 2019, Peru will continue to support the facilitation of a minimum framework of understanding for the resumption of direct negotiations between the parties, as well as an improvement of the situation on the ground.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Pakistan.

Ms. Lodhi (Pakistan): My delegation thanks the French presidency of the Security Council for convening this open debate. Let me also thank the Assistant Secretary-General for his briefing.

Discussions on the situation in the Middle East invariably become a sombre reminder of the spectre of violence, turmoil and conflict that has afflicted millions of people across the region. Nothing epitomizes that more than the plight and suffering of the Palestinian people. On the fiftieth anniversary of the illegal occupation of their homeland, the aspirations of the Palestinian people to live a life of freedom and dignity still remain a distant and elusive ideal. The lack of progress on the Palestinian issue has not only betrayed the hopes and aspirations of generations of Palestinians, it has also sowed the seeds of seemingly endless hostility and discord in the region.

However, some aspects of the Middle East's political landscape today offer reason for optimism.

The political reconciliation forged between Fatah and Hamas in Cairo last week is a landmark achievement. It not only restores political unity within Palestinian ranks, but also provides renewed strength and vigour to the legitimate cause of the Palestinian people. We congratulate the Palestinians on that singular achievement and hope that it will lead to real progress. But that development by itself is not enough to tip the scales of justice in favour of the long-suffering Palestinians. The international community must renew its resolve to sustain that positive momentum. As a first step, the illegal and oppressive siege of Gaza by Israel must be lifted.

A viable, independent and contiguous State of Palestine — on the basis of internationally agreed parameters, the pre-1967 borders and Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital — is the only sustainable guarantee for enduring peace in the Middle East. During his recent visit to Gaza, Secretary-General António Guterres said: "I have a dream. A dream to one day see the Holy Land with two States". Yet that vision is consistently and brazenly being undermined by the illegal Israeli settlements in occupied territories. As affirmed by the Secretary-General's reports to the Security Council pursuant to its resolution 2334 (2016), settlement activity has in fact been stepped up. It has intensified. In addition, the systematic practice of dispossessing Palestinians of their homes and displacing them from their lands and livelihoods in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, continues unabated.

Any unilateral attempts by Israel to alter or re-engineer the existing status quo in the old city of Jerusalem is an unacceptable provocation for billions of Muslims around the world — it must cease. That was highlighted again during tensions surrounding the Holy Al-Aqsa Mosque in July. Creating alternative facts on the ground cannot change historic realities or neutralize or reverse the legal rights of people living under foreign occupation, in Palestine or indeed elsewhere.

A just peace in Palestine is not only a matter of regional significance; it is a fundamental precondition for global peace and security. A two-State solution remains an absolute imperative. There is no "plan B". There can be no other plan than a two-State solution for the region.

Challenges confronting the Middle East are complex and myriad. They are also often mutually reinforcing and interlinked, and therefore require greater cooperation and coordination between the States of the region.

Pakistan reaffirms its unequivocal support to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the brotherly people of Iraq. We are convinced that a solution to Iraq's problems must be found within a united and inclusive Iraqi State, while recognizing and reconciling the interests of all Iraqi people.

On Syria, a Syrian-led and Syrian-driven process of political reconciliation is the only pathway to lasting peace in that country. The intra-Syrian talks are pivotal to that end. We hope that the parties will show the necessary flexibility and compromise to bridge their differences.

The situation in Yemen remains grim: 15 million people in the country lack adequate access to clean water, sanitation and hygiene, while 7 million are faced with the threat of famine. All of that is exacerbated by the over 800,000 suspected cases of cholera. That demands a surge in diplomacy as well as in humanitarian support to the millions of people in need across the country.

In conclusion, Secretary-General António Guterres noted in his address to the General Assembly this year that "[w]e are a world in pieces. We need to be a world at peace." (*A/72/PV.3, p. 1*) Our journey towards this shared ideal for world peace and world accord can only begin in the Middle East.

The President (*spoke in French*) I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): On 2 November 1917, almost exactly 100 years ago, a British colonialist declaration was issued unilaterally and without consulting the Palestinians — the landowners. The Balfour Declaration, adopted by the League of Nations, tried to legitimize that act by inserting into it what was referred to as the British Mandate for Palestine in 1922.

We heard our British colleague this morning express the pride of his country's Government in issuing that Declaration, which is known legally and internationally as a promise from someone who does not own something to someone who does not deserve it. By then the League of Nations operated as a colonialist company, which replicated in Palestine the experiences of the East India Company and the British South Africa Company. Both experiences generated racist regimes,

including in South Africa in what used to be called Southern Rhodesia.

The United Nations did not seek to rectify the mistake of the League of Nations, as it did with many other issues. Instead, it continued the same approach with regard to Palestine and adopted General Assembly resolution 181 (II), in 1947, which provided for the partition of Palestine and the creation of the Israeli entity. That entity later enjoyed membership of the United Nations following pressure exerted by powerful States.

The support, assistance and protection provided to Israel by certain States, including some permanent members of the Security Council, as well as the systemic and deliberate obstruction of the implementation of dozens of resolutions intended to end this brutal occupation, have led to Israel's arrogance in both the region and the Security Council Chamber. It has led to Israel's expansion and further expropriation of Palestinian Arab land and the perpetration of crimes, aggression and systematic violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law that could constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity.

General Assembly resolution 273 (III), of 1949, outlined the conditions for approving Israel's membership of the United Nations. Israel was to comply with resolution 181 (II), which provided for the establishment of the Palestinian State. It was also required to comply with resolution 194 (III), of 1948, which provided for the return of Palestinian refugees to their homeland. However, unfortunately, what happened afterwards was the complete opposite.

The United Nations implemented half of resolution 181 (II). It allowed for the creation of Israel in Palestine, but denied Palestinians their right to establish their State. It has also completely abandoned impiementation of resolution 194 (III), which provided for the return of Palestinian refugees to their homeland. That served to compound the injustice suffered by the Palestinian people, whose destiney has remained under a racist occupation that is unparalleled in history.

My country, as the Council is aware, is a key party in Security Council debates on the situation the Middle East, and we reiterate once again that Syria's sovereign rights in the Golan Heights, along the borders of 4 June the 1967, are not subject to compromise or surrender. All of our occupied lands and rights will be returned fully to their rightful owners — the settlers will have to leave our land sooner or later. We will not abandon our right to reclaim our occupied land and liberate our citizens living under Israeli occupation in the Syrian Golan, using all the instruments available under the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations and the principles of international law and the Council's resolutions.

The world's suspicious and continuing silence in the face of Israel's policies and practices has encouraged Israel to continue to violate the Separation of Forces Agreement and the resolutions of Security Council. It has provided all forms of support to armed terrorist groups in the area of separation, including Jabhat Al-Nusra and Da'esh, and has facilitated those groups taking over sites of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force, thereby jeopardizing the lives of its personnel. In fact, groups of troops were kidnapped from the Fiji and Philippines contingents.

Israel has continued to commit crimes by providing direct and indirect support to Da'esh and other terrorist groups and launching repeated attacks on the territories of the Syrian Arab Republic. That means that Israel is not only supporting Da'esh in the occupied Syrian Golan but also supporting terrorist elements inside Syria itself. It is supporting the Da'esh terrorist gangs in Syria.

My country believes that the Security Council still shoulders a historical responsibility in rectifying its course and restoring justice. The goal that has brought us here every month for many years must take the form of immediate, necessary measures by the Security Council — if it is indeed keen to achieve peace and security in the region in order to end the Israeli occupation of Arab territories, including the Syrian Golan. That must include Israel's withdrawal from the occupied territories in the Syrian Golan, Palestine and parts of southern Lebanon, to the borders of 4 June 1967, as well as the implementation of resolutions 497 (1981), 338 (1973) and 242 (1967).

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Archbishop Bernardito Cleopas Auza, Permanent Observer of the Observer State of the Holy See to the United Nations.

Archbishop Auza: The region of the Middle East continues to be the epicentre of multiple armed conflicts driven by various causes and by interests of a multitude of actors who participate in them in one way or another. Among those conflicts, which have been of deep concern for the international community for the past 70 years,

are the unachieved Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. The Palestinian question remains paramount among all the problems affecting the Middle East. Its resolution would have a beneficial, cascading effect on the other crises in the region, thereby favouring the advent of durable peace and mutual respect among the diverse components and stakeholders in the Middle East.

For that reason, as it has done since 1947, the Holy See once again reaffirms its unwavering support for the right of both Israel and Palestine to live in peace within secure and recognized borders in an atmosphere of mutual respect and cooperation. The Holy See reiterates its support for the solution of two independent States, convinced that it is the only option that would allow for the peaceful coexistence of Israel and Palestine.

The Holy See calls on the Israeli and Palestinian authorities to show determined political will to reach a solution and give their peoples the precious gift of living in peace and security. Such determination would involve refraining from provocative actions, incitement or inflammatory rhetoric in order to de-escalate tensions on the ground, rebuild trust and create the conditions necessary for negotiations. The impartial support of the international community is needed to assist the two parties in negotiating with confidence and respect for mutual rights and helping them to realize that sincere negotiation is the most effective way towards an honourable and mutually beneficial outcome.

The Holy See acknowledges with satisfaction the recent agreement among the Palestinians, which seems to indicate firm will towards reaching a durable solution.

The Holy See wishes to reaffirm the historic status quo of Jerusalem, in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions, and rejects any unilateral measure aimed at changing it. My delegation believes that the Holy City should be a place of convergence and peace and that the followers of the three monotheistic religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam — indeed, all people of goodwill — should be guaranteed free and unhindered access to the holy places.

My delegation wishes to convey the deep appreciation and strong encouragement of Pope Francis to all who tirelessly toil to find fair political solutions to the many conflicts in the Middle East and to assist in every way the victims of untold violence. Given the continuing overwhelming humanitarian needs in the region, the Holy See continues to add its voice to the appeals for increased funding to help refugees and the host countries affected, in particular Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, Turkey and Egypt.

The rights of every citizen everywhere in the Middle East must be respected. In that regard, the rule of law, including respect for religious freedom and equality before the law based on the principle of citizenship, regardless of one's race, ethnic origin or religion, is fundamental for the achievement and maintenance of peaceful and fruitful coexistence among individuals and communities in the region and beyond.

For 2017 to be the start of an era of peace for all the peoples of the Middle East, all the parties concerned in the conflicts in the region, their foreign allies and the entire international community must spare no effort to silence the clamour of war and to start serious negotiations to achieve lasting political solutions to the problems in the Middle East, both recent and ongoing.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Kuwait.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): Let me thank the President for convening this meeting, as well as Mr. Jenča for his important briefing to the Security Council.

We associate ourselves with the statement made by the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

More than 50 years have passed since the start of the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem. In that time, we have seen continuous violations of the most fundamental rules of international law, including breaches by Israel of its legal obligations as an occupying Power under international conventions.

The illegal plans and policies aimed at Judaizing the Holy City, distorting its national Arab identity and at altering its demographic composition, in addition to isolating it from the rest of Palestinian territory, continue, as does the illegal expansion of settlement activities in the Palestinian territories. Thas has taken place despite the numerous Security Council resolutions that have condemned Israeli practices and confirmed their illegality, the most recent being resolution 2334 (2016). Faced with that fact, the international community has remained incapable of making the occupying force comply with its resolutions. It is disconcerting to see the disdain shown by the occupying Power for the

Council and its resolutions, which are supposed to be enforceable under Article 25 of the Charter of the United Nations.

We reject all Israeli unilateral steps aimed at changing the facts on the ground and compromising the two-State solution within the pre-1967 borders. We reiterate that the desired peace must include an end to the occupation, which has already lasted for 50 years, in accordance with resolutions of international legitimacy, the principle of land for peace, the Quartet road map and the 2002 Beirut Arab Peace Initiative. These are based on the terms of reference that call for the withdrawal of Israel from all the Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese territories to the borders of 4 June 1967, including addressing all final status issues in order to allow the Palestinian people to enjoy their political rights.

The State of Kuwait welcomes the agreement among our Palestinian brothers in Fatah and Hamas, and we pay tribute to the efforts made by the Arab Republic of Egypt to arrive at that agreement. National reconciliation among our Palestinian brothers is a historic achievement and an important step in the right direction to end the division that has harmed the Palestinian cause. The agreement is also a prologue to unifying the ranks of the Palestinians so that they will be better equipped to face the challenges that the Palestinian question is confronted with. It will contribute to the fulfilment of the aspirations of the Palestinian people.

As Kuwait will soon join the Security Council as an elected member for the period 2018-2019, we would like to stress that we will continue to support the Palestinian question and to bring pressure to bear on Israel, the occupying Power, so that it desists forthwith from policies that run counter to international legitimacy and international agreements, including the 1949 Fourth Geneva Convention. We will continue to work to ensure that Israel respects and implements Security Council resolutions, in particular resolution 2234 (2016), as well as to make progress in a process led by the international community, in particular the Security Council and the five permanent members, as well as the Middle East Quartet. In that way, our efforts would be helpful in establishing a time frame to complete the negotiations between the Palestinian and Israeli parties in order to arrive at a two-State solution.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of South Africa.

Mr. Mminele (South Africa): We join other Member States in expression appreciation to you, Madam, and the delegation of France for organizing this open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine.

South Africa aligns itself with the statement made by the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries (NAM).

We also welcome the report (S/2017/515) of the Secretary-General on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016). However, we reiterate the position, articulated by the representative of Venezuela on behalf of NAM, on the need for a substantive written report, which would provide a valuable record of the implementation process and dissuade continued violations of the resolution. It should also include an assessment of the long-term humanitarian impact of such violations.

This open debate is taking place against the backdrop of the announcement by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu that the construction of 3,800 new housing units in the West Bank for Jewish settlers has been approved. The increased settlement expansion constitutes a contravention of international law, particularly the 1949 Fourth Geneva Convention. It also illustrates continued disregard for international norms necessary for the Security Council to fulfil its primary mandate of pursuing international peace and security, as well as a direct violation of resolution 2334 (2016).

The situation on the ground cannot be allowed to continue. It is a blight of on the conscience of the international community. There is no doubt that the pattern of human rights violations associated with the occupation is inextricably linked to the settlement enterprise. The ongoing settlement activities by Israel in the occupied Palestinian territories seriously undermines the two-State solution and threatens the viability and territorial contiguity of the future Palestinian State. It is an enduring impediment to peace, security, stability and development in the wider Middle East region.

South Africa would like to emphasize the urgent need for Israel to lift the illegal land and naval blockade on Gaza, which has now entered its eleventh

year. The blockade continues to worsen the already dire socioeconomic and humanitarian situation in Gaza. Unemployment in Gaza stands at 38.4 per cent, with youth and women unemployment at a shocking 60 per cent and 84 per cent, respectively. This economic situation has not been helped by Palestine's state of energy dependence on Israel, and can only fuel resentment among a disenfranchised youth population. The ongoing occupation and the situation in Gaza makes it virtually impossible to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. These recent actions are part of a long-established pattern of stifling the development of a viable Palestinian State and illustrate a disingenuous approach to finding a solution to the crisis, which has persisted for half a century without resolution.

South Africa welcomes the positive outcome of the Palestinian reconciliation deal and hopes that it will provide an effective and unified base on which to govern Gaza and promote greater national unity within Palestine. Such unity should prove vital not only in pursuing a better life for Palestinians in Gaza, but in presenting a unified and coherent articulation of Palestinian concerns.

My delegation continues to express deep concerns regarding the situation of Palestinian prisoners and detainees, specifically women and children. This situation remains of serious concern to the international community as well. In that regard, we call on Israel to respect the human rights of all Palestinian prisoners and abide by the relevant international humanitarian law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention. We also call on the Israeli authorities to implement in full and immediately the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, known as the Nelson Mandela Rules, as well as the Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners, known as the Bangkok Rules.

My delegation is furthermore concerned about the funding gap in the operational budget of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). In the absence of a lasting political solution, the international community cannot abdicate its responsibility and duty towards Palestinian refugees and for ensuring the continuation of the agency's work on a sound financial basis. For its part, South Africa will continue to support UNRWA through its financial contributions. As a member of the group made up of India, Brazil and South Africa (IBSA), we will provide humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian people through the IBSA fund. Furthermore, in cooperation with the Palestinian Authority and other international organizations, we support projects in Nablus and in Gaza.

In conclusion, South Africa concurs with the international community that the only way to bring about genuine and lasting peace between Israel and Palestine is through comprehensive and unconditional negotiations. Such negotiations should deal with all final-status issues, including the unrelenting expansion of Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories, the lifting of the illegal Gaza blockade and the continuing occupation of the Palestinian territory. We believe that would contribute immensely to peace and security throughout the Middle East and resolve one of the most protracted conflicts the past century has known.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Namibia.

Mr. Gertze (Namibia): I congratulate you, Madam President, on your country's assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of October. I also thank you for organizing this open debate on the important topic of the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine. I would also like to thank Assistant Secretary-General Miroslav Jenčafor his comprehensive and detailed briefing.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement delivered by the Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs of Venezuela on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, as well as with the statement to be delivered by representative of Nicaragua on behalf of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

Since our previous meeting, in July (see S/PV.8011), Israel has continued to increase its settlement activity at a faster rate than last year. Settlement activity during this reporting period was centred on East Jerusalem, where plans were made for over 2,300 housing units in July. According to resolution 2334 (2016), Israel has not ceased all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, or fully respected all of its legal obligations in that regard. The settlements are illegal under international law. They are a serious impediment to the peace process and the realization of the two-State solution.

The destruction of Palestinian homes and infrastructure in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, has also continued, albeit at a slower rate, with 344 structures having been demolished since January 2017, thereby displacing approximately 500 people. Another sad fact is that, on 3 August, educational facilities attended by 175 children were demolished or damaged. The Government of Israel said that those facilities were constructed illegally, despite the fact that building permits for new Palestinian homes and infrastructure in the occupied West Bank are almost impossible to obtain.

On 26 July, an amendment to the Basic Law: Jerusalem the Capital of Israel passed a first reading in the Knesset Law Committee. Were the amendment to be adopted, it would further cement Israeli control over East Jerusalem.

The issue of violence continues to be one of the main factors preventing the resolution of this conflict. As our Constitution clearly states, Namibia "encourages the settlement of international disputes by peaceful means". We note the deaths on both sides due to attacks — Palestinians and Israelis — with sadness and concern. We take this opportunity once again to condemn terrorism in all its forms and to call for dialogue between all parties.

Despite the ongoing challenges, we are encouraged by the visit of Palestinian Prime Minister Rami Hamdallah to Gaza at the beginning of October, his first in two years. On 12 October, Hamas and the Palestinian Authority signed a reconciliation agreement that aims to mend the decade-long rift. It places Gaza and the West Bank under one Government for the first time since 2007. Those are all positive steps, which we hope indicate forward movement.

As the conflict in Syria continues, we are encouraged by recent efforts to de-escalate the crisis following talks. However, much more work needs to be done, and we hope that the eighth round of intra-Syrian talks convened by Mr. Staffan de Mistura in Geneva will provide further positive steps.

As the conflict in Yemen continues, the lives of 20.7 million people have been severely impacted. They require humanitarian protection and support, with 9.8 million people in acute need of assistance. An estimated 17 million people are food insecure. Cholera is also rife in the country. This humanitarian crisis is man-made and must be brought to an end without delay.

As those conflicts continue in the Middle East region, the Arab-Israeli conflict stretches back over many decades. Namibia firmly believes that ending the Arab-Israeli conflict will help curtail other violent conflicts in the region. We call on the Israeli Government to end all construction of settlements and the destruction of Palestinian homes and infrastructure. We once again call for Israel's complete and unconditional withdrawal from the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, and urge all parties to return to the negotiating table to ensure that the Palestinian people are able to exercise their inalienable rights in an independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and as a rightful Member of the United Nations and its specialized agencies.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Bangladesh.

Mr. Bin Momen (Bangladesh): We convey our appreciation to the French presidency for having convened this open debate.

Bangladesh aligns itself with the statement made by the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

We thank the Secretary-General's Special Representative for his comprehensive oral report pursuant to resolution 2234 (2016) and would once again underline the need for a written report. We also align ourselves with the concrete points made by the Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine.

In this fiftieth year of the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian and Arab territories, we reiterate the need for the Security Council to demonstrate its resolve to address the Palestinian question as a matter of urgency. It is worth noting that this year also marks the fiftieth anniversary of resolution 242 (1967).

As Bangladesh is currently overwhelmed by the massive, unprecedented influx of forcibly displaced people from Myanmar's Rakhine state, we cannot but remain profoundly concerned over the protracted illegal occupation and humanitarian situation faced by the Palestinian people. Bangladesh has been dealing with the Rohingya situation for the past three decades and is seeking the Security Council's collective and decisive initiative to lend support to the bilateral diplomatic efforts pursued by Bangladesh with Myanmar. It is crucial that the Security Council demonstrate the unity of purpose to find peaceful, just and lasting solutions

to all of these protracted crises, which will otherwise continue to pose serious threats to international and regional peace and security.

The continued breaches of international humanitarian law and the systematic human rights violations in the occupied Palestinian territories have given rise to an egregious culture of impunity. In the absence of effective international accountability, the occupying Power continues to enforce violence against Palestinian citizens, imprisoning and abusing scores of Palestinians in its detention centres and dispossessing and displacing thousands of Palestinian families through its construction and expansion of illegal settlements.

We share the concerns over the reported lack of progress in implementing resolution 2234 (2016). It is obvious that the illegal Israeli settlements as well as the wall in and around occupied East Jerusalem are being deliberately pursued in order to fundamentally change the character, status and demography of the occupied Palestinian territories.

The Council has a moral obligation to prevail upon Israel to immediately halt its illegal settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories, lift the blockade in the Gaza Strip and put an end to all forms of occupation. Immediate priority must be given to ensuring international protection for the Palestinian people, who have suffered for decades from Israel's policy of collective punishment. The hunger strike recently observed by thousands of prisoners in Israeli detention centres underscores the need for the international community's sustained efforts to address their grievances and plight.

Under the guidance of our Honourable Prime Minister, the Government and the people of Bangladesh remain steadfast in our support for the just and legitimate struggle of the Palestinian people for their inalienable rights, including their right to self-determination and the establishment of an independent, viable, contiguous and sovereign Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, in the framework of a two-State solution. Bangladesh acknowledges the developments on political unity and reconciliation in Palestine, which we consider to be a step in the right direction.

Bangladesh looks forward to positive signs emerging from the various regional and bilateral initiatives being pursued to address the Palestinian question in the context of the two-State solution. We continue to urge all key actors to continue their efforts to pursue a comprehensive solution to the Palestinian issue, consistent with the relevant Security Council resolutions and in accordance with the Arab Peace Initiative, the Quartet road map and the principle of land for peace.

We also echo the need to ensure enhanced, predictable and sustainable funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East in order for it to effectively carry out its humanitarian mandate in support of the Palestinian refugees.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Morocco.

Mr. Atlassi (Morocco) (*spoke in Arabic*): I am pleased, Madam, to congratulate you on France's assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month, and I thank you for the initiative to discuss the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine. I also thank Mr. Miroslav Jenča, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his valuable briefing on the issue.

Palestine witnessed a positive development with the reconciliation among Palestinian factions and the exercise by the Palestinian Authority of its authority over the Palestinian territories. This will serve the interests of the Palestinian people and allow them to achieve their aspiration of establishing their own State on Palestinian territory, within the 1967 borders.

We reiterate that, regrettably, the Palestinian question remains at an impasse, without any possible opening or détente that would allow the parties to sit at the negotiating table, because the international community is preoccupied with events in the region and in the international arena. This negative state of affairs is reflected in the deteriorating Palestinian situation and the deadlock that has characterized it since 2014.

Israel, regrettably, continues to pursue a policy of settlement in the territories occupied since 1967. This runs counter to international law, including resolution 2334 (2016). The 50 years of occupation of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, the policy of Judaization and the settlement policy have given rise to a sense of failure among the Palestinian people, who feel that the international community has betrayed them. This has had many negative repercussions, including an increase in the level of violence and the

resort to terrorism by some who believe that they have no other option.

Jerusalem is a symbol of coexistence. It has a special status not only among the people of Jerusalem but also for adherents to the three faiths. It is the Qibla of more than 3 billion Muslims, and any attempt to compromise the legal status of Al-Quds Al-Sharif will only foment hatred and push people to embrace terrorism and encourage it in the region as a whole.

The Kingdom of Morocco and His Highness the King of Morocco, who presides over the Jerusalem Committee, call for the establishment of the State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, because His Highness believes that this is the only way to achieve peace and end conflict in the Middle East and to promote international peace and security. His Royal Highness has stressed on more than one occasion and through different means, including a letter addressed to the Secretary-General in June, the violations by Israel of the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the danger of the Judaization of Jerusalem, as well as the unilateral decisions taken and the need to end settlement activities. His Royal Highness stressed the support of the Kingdom of Morocco for all initiatives aimed at arriving at a settlement that guarantees the establishment of a Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, within the 1967 borders, living side by side in peace and security with Israel.

In conclusion, the position of Morocco continues to be based on the tenets of the Arab Peace Initiative and the terms of reference that call for the establishment of an independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, within the June 1967 borders.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Joanne Adamson, Deputy Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations.

Ms. Adamson: The candidate countries Montenegro and Albania align themselves with this statement.

On 16 October, the 28 Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the European Union (EU) adopted a statement on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) — the culmination of 12 years of diplomacy facilitated by the EU, unanimously endorsed by Security Council resolution 2231 (2015). The successful implementation of the JCPOA continues to ensure that Iran's nuclear programme remains exclusively peaceful. While the EU expresses its concerns related to ballistic missiles and increasing tensions in the region, the EU reiterates the need to address them outside the JCPOA, and it is determined to preserve the JCPOA as a key pillar of the international non-proliferation architecture.

The Middle East peace process remains at the top of the European Union agenda. At the open debate on 25 July (see S/PV.8011), we restated the EU's core policy positions on this topic, as reflected in successive EU Council conclusions, proving clarity and consistency. The EU's commitment to achieving a two-State solution is the central element of our policy. A negotiated two-State solution that ends the occupation and fulfils the aspirations of both sides is the only way to bring about the lasting peace and security that both Israelis and Palestinians deserve. That is also why the EU will continue to speak out clearly when developments or incidents threaten the two-State solution and undermine the peace process.

We have noted with deep concern the reports of the United Nations Special Coordinator Mladenov on settlement activities and related actions, not least in East Jerusalem, including the third report on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016), stressing the high rate of settlement activities throughout 2017.

The EU deeply deplores the decisions taken this week by the Israeli authorities to promote further plans, tenders and permits for thousands of settlement units across the West Bank, including, for the first time since 2002, in the heart of Hebron. We have also seen reports of construction work starting for the first new settlement in 20 years, Amihai, and of preparatory ground work being initiated in the sensitive area of Givat Hamatos in East Jerusalem, where further settlement construction would severely jeopardize the contiguity and viability of a future Palestinian State. We urge Israel to reverse those decisions, which run counter to international law and directly threaten the two-State solution.

The EU's position on Israeli settlement construction and related activities, including recent evictions in East Jerusalem and plans leading to the forced transfer of the Bedouin communities in the West Bank, is clear and has not changed — the EU remains strongly opposed to Israel's settlement policy, which is illegal under international law. As reaffirmed by resolution 2334 (2016), it also dangerously threatens the viability of the two-State solution. The international community will not recognize any changes to the 4 June 1967

lines, including with regard to Jerusalem, other than those agreed to by the parties themselves through negotiations. Settlement activity in East Jerusalem seriously jeopardizes the possibility of Jerusalem serving as the future capital of both States.

The EU also strongly opposes related actions taken in the same context, such as continued demolitions and confiscations — including of EU and EU member State-funded projects — in the occupied Palestinian territory.

The EU is deeply concerned that the continuing cycle of violence has led to a serious loss of human life in Israel and the Palestinian territory in recent months. The EU firmly condemns the terror attacks and violence from all sides and in any circumstances. In late September, a fatal shooting incident took place at the entrance of a West Bank settlement, as a Palestinian gunman killed three Israelis — one police man and two security guards. Another security guard was gravely injured. The EU expresses condolences to those affected, and its regret for all loss of life. Resolution 2334 (2016) condemns all acts of violence against civilians. The EU also firmly rejects any incitement to hatred or violence, which we see as fundamentally incompatible with advancing a peaceful resolution. Upholding commitments to act effectively against violence and incitement is critical in order to rebuild mutual trust and avoid another escalation.

Let me now turn to the situation in Gaza, where an already dire humanitarian situation has been worsening in past months, not least due to the division in the Palestinian political arena. The EU has consistently urged all Palestinian factions to work together to address the needs of the Palestinian population. A single, legitimate and democratic Palestinian Authority, with full control over the West Bank and Gaza, is critical for achieving a viable Palestinian State.

The EU welcomes the agreement signed in Cairo on 12 October. We believe that it can become an important step for making genuine progress on intra-Palestinian reconciliation. The EU will closely study the details of the agreement and its implications, and we welcome the continuing engagement of Egypt. If fully implemented, the agreement can become an important step towards achieving the goal of Palestinian unity under a single, legitimate and democratic Palestinian national authority on the basis of the Palestine Liberation Organization platform, the Quartet principles and in accordance with existing agreements. The EU is ready to fully support those efforts and will continue to liaise with Egypt, our interlocutors on the ground and our international partners, in order to help the process succeed.

The EU calls for unimpeded humanitarian access to Gaza, as foreseen by international humanitarian law, for national, local and international humanitarian organizations, including EU bodies and all EU member States. The unsustainable situation in Gaza and recent tensions in Jerusalem serve to underline the need for a political horizon. That is why the EU will continue to work tirelessly with the parties and regional and international partners, not least within the Middle East Quartet, to promote a return to a meaningful process towards a negotiated two-State solution, in line with known parameters — towards a peace that can be sustained.

Let me also speak about Lebanon. On 30 August 2017, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2373 (2017), renewing the mandate of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) for one year. We welcome the resolution and reaffirm our full support of UNIFIL, including its maritime component, whose deployment within its existing mandate, alongside the Lebanese Armed Forces, is crucial to maintain stability and security in southern Lebanon and along the Lebanese shores. UNIFIL must be provided with the necessary means and equipment to guarantee its full operational capability. In parallel, assistance to the Lebanese Armed Forces must continue to allow it to maintain security across the country and fight terrorism.

In Syria, the fighting is not over. The EU firmly believes that there can be no military solution to the conflict, and is committed to the unity, sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of the Syrian State. Only a credible political solution, as defined in resolution 2254 (2015) and the 2012 Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex), will ensure the stability of Syria and enable a decisive defeat of Da'esh and other United Nations-designated terrorist groups in Syria. The EU fully supports Special Envoy de Mistura's efforts to that end.

The EU strongly condemns the continued systematic, widespread and gross violations and abuses of human rights and violations of international humanitarian law by all parties, particularly by the Syrian regime. This must end and those responsible

must be held accountable. At the Syria event that the EU organized in New York on the margins of the General Assembly, High Representative Mogherini launched the Brussels process, which aims at maintaining the focus of the international community on the conflict in Syria, the continuing humanitarian situation and sustaining international engagement in support of achieving a lasting political solution, negotiated in Geneva in line with resolution 2254 (2015), to the benefit of the Syrian people and the region. The EU has agreed to increase efforts to ensure both the full and effective participation of women and sustained consultation and dialogue with civil society in the political process.

The EU reiterates that it will be ready to assist in the reconstruction of Syria only when a comprehensive, genuine and inclusive political transition, negotiated by the Syrian parties in the conflict, on the basis of resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva communiqué, is firmly under way.

Turning to Iraq, first of all, we welcome that Iraqi forces — with the support of the Global Coalition against Da'esh — have succeeded in inflicting a rapid defeat on Da'esh in Hawijah. In relation to the unilateral referendum held in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, the EU continues to support the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Iraq. The EU believes that the general interests of Iraqi people are best served through dialogue and cooperation, that unilateral steps must be avoided and that all open questions must be resolved through consensual positions based on the full application of the provisions of the Iraqi Constitution.

The EU calls on the Federal Government of Iraq and the Kurdistan Regional Government to build on their successful cooperation on security in the campaign to liberate Mosul and to engage in a constructive dialogue on all issues across the political and economic spectrum, including the disputed internal boundaries. The EU also urges all parties in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq to seek common ground and restore the functioning of its democratic institutions, including by holding regional elections.

In that respect, we are extremely worried about the risk of escalation, not least in Kirkuk. There can be no military solution to intra-Iraqi differences. All parties must now show restraint, refrain from further escalation and engage in a constructive dialogue about all open questions, based on the provisions of the Iraqi Constitution.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Qatar.

Ms. Al-Thani (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank the President for convening today's meeting and Assistant Secretary-General Miroslav Jenča for his briefing.

This open debate is taking place against a backdrop of important developments, with the promise of a new era of Palestinian unity through the formation of a Palestinian National Unity Government that represents all Palestinian factions. In that regard, I reiterate that Qatar welcomes the signing of a reconciliation agreement between Fatah and Hamas, along with the formation of a national Government and its assumption of its duties in the Gaza Strip. We in Qatar are conscious of the significance of the current phase in the continuing efforts to achieve peace in the Middle East and want to emphasize the importance of making progress in implementing the reconciliation agreement, with a view to achieving the national unity that the Palestinian people aspire to. We are hopeful that those recent positive developments will be an additional incentive to making progress and moving past the current stagnation in the peace process, in order to give the region's nations and people renewed hope. Qatar has recently been striving to do all it can to help move the peace process forward, including by supporting Palestinian reconciliation and providing humanitarian assistance to our Palestinian brethren, while also continuing to work with the international community to achieve peace.

If we are to achieve peace for both Palestine and Israel, all the parties must comply with international law while working diligently to create an environment conducive to peace and security through de-escalation efforts and by ensuring respect for religious sites, particularly Al-Haram Al-Sharif, with the aim of achieving stability in the region and helping to de-escalate other crises. Qatar supports the concept of a two-State solution whereby the two countries can live side by side in peaceful coexistence. That entails establishing an independent Palestinian State, within its 1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital, in line with the relevant Security Council resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative.

The risks and threats to international peace and security posed by the continuing crisis in Syria will require intensified effort if we are to reach a political solution. We reiterate our position in support of all efforts

in that regard, based on the 2012 Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex) and the relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolution 2254 (2015), in order to fulfil the Syrian people's desire to achieve stability and safeguard their country's territorial integrity. In that regard, we support all efforts to de-escalate the situation and prevent tensions, based on the Charter of the United Nations, international law and international humanitarian law, as well as the Astana process. We will also increase our cooperation with our international partners in providing assistance to our Syrian brothers and sisters.

If we are to address the current crisis in the Middle East and end extremism and terrorism there, we must tackle its grave and complex challenges through joint efforts and intensified cooperation. As new conflicts emerge, they contribute to the complexity of the existing crises and hinder international efforts at a time when the overall scenario in the region is already very complicated. Qatar has been experiencing a completely unjustifiable blockade since the beginning of June that is a blatant violation of international law and the Charter and that undermines friendly relations among States, creating an atmosphere of instability in the region. Despite those attacks on Qatar, which is maintaining its policy of working to resolve conflicts peacefully, we reiterate our support for the offer by His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the Amir of Kuwait, to provide genuine mediation and appreciate the attitude of all the allied nations that have supported it.

In conclusion, Qatar reiterates its commitment to participating effectively and positively in support of all efforts aimed at achieving peace in the Middle East and the Security Council's objectives in the maintenance of international peace and security.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the Vice-Chair of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

Mrs. Rodríguez Camejo (*spoke in Spanish*): Seventy years after the General Assembly decided to partition Palestine and laid the foundations for the creation of the State of Israel, the State of Palestine has yet to attain independence and the rights of the Palestinian people continue to be violated. Until the Palestine question is resolved in every aspect, the United Nations and its organs, including the Security Council, will have a historical and permanent responsibility to assist the Palestinian people in achieving peace and a dignified life through the exercise of their inalienable rights, including the right to self-determination and national independence, as well as the rights of refugees.

The members of the Security Council have repeatedly stressed that the current status quo is unsustainable. After his visit to Israel and Palestine, the Secretary-General warned that we should not allow today's stagnating peace process to lead to tomorrow's escalation. At a time when the 50-year-long occupation is gradually, if not immediately, becoming an annexation, it is increasingly evident that the status quo is far from static. Rather, we are witnessing a steadily deteriorating situation on the ground along with the systematic dispossession of the Palestinian people, crushing any hope for them of achieving freedom, equal rights and a just peace. The ongoing Israeli settlement campaign, which the Council has denounced as illegal, is proof of the growing trend towards displacement. Last month, Israel announced plans to evacuate Susiya and Khan Al-Ahmar in Area C of the West Bank, communities living on lands that are supposedly intended for settlement expansion. In addition, in August the Israeli authorities issued a military order creating a public administration in Hebron that strengthens the situation of settlers there. The Israeli group Peace Now has warned that the order formalizes the apartheid system in that city.

At its September conference the Israeli National Union faction announced a bold plan providing for the annexation of occupied territory, displacing Palestinians and stripping them of their inalienable rights if they are not willing to give them up. Such extremist plans are continuously compounded by the provocative and inflammatory rhetoric of the Israeli Government and military officials, including the Prime Minister himself. The Committee reiterates the Council's repeated calls on both parties to refrain from provocative actions, incitement and inflammatory rhetoric.

The Council cannot ignore these dangerous developments. Moreover, we are not doomed to collective failure; there is a way out of the conundrum. There is a consensus that Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, not only violate international law, but also dangerously imperil the viability of the two-State solution. Resolution 2334 (2016) provides Member States with the tools to reverse the negative trends on the ground, salvage the two-State solution and, in accordance with the mandate entrusted

to the Council in the Charter of the United Nations, advance the cause of peace and security.

The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People stands ready to support the Council in its efforts to consider practical ways and means to secure full compliance with the resolution. In addition, with regard to the recommendations contained in its 2017 annual report to the General Assembly (A/72/35), the Committee reiterates its request to the Secretary-General to present reports on its implementation in written format, including proposals on measures to ensure accountability for settlement activities and other violations of international law.

The Committee welcomes the necessary political will demonstrated by all parties to facilitate Palestinian reconciliation and create conditions favourable for the effective functioning of a Palestinian Government of national consensus. Let me acknowledge the constructive role played by Egypt toward this end. The Committee offers its support to all efforts to advance intra-Palestinian unity and reiterates its demand for ending the unlawful 10-year Israeli blockade on the Gaza Strip. It also welcomes ongoing diplomatic efforts towards the achievement of the two-State solution, including by China, the Russian Federation, the United States and Arab countries, among others.

To support the Palestinian State-building process, the Committee will continue to expand its capacity-building programme by, inter alia, sponsoring a Palestinian official in a training course on multilateral environmental negotiations, to be held in France, and three other officials on United Nations catalytic support to South-South and triangular cooperation in implementing the 2030 Agenda, to be held in Germany.

Last month, the gathering of world leaders in New York for the annual general debate testified to faith in multilateralism and a rules-based international order as the only path to address threats to international peace and security.

If we wish to restore hope and make a difference in the lives of ordinary people; if we want to put conflict prevention and resolution at the centre of United Nations reform and if we seek to build sustainable peace in the Middle East, urgent action is required from the Council. In this spirit, the Committee calls on everyone to redouble efforts towards the achievement of the two-State solution based on the 1967 borders and in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid principles, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet road map.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of the United Arab Emirates.

Mr. Almahmoud (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): On behalf of the United Arab Emirates, I congratulate France on assuming the presidency of the Security Council and thank it for presiding over this important quarterly debate. The United Arab Emirates also extends its gratitude to Mr. Miroslav Jenča, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his briefing this morning.

The United Arab Emirates supports the regional and international efforts to push the Middle East peace process forward that resulted in the adoption of resolution 2334 (2016) and the signing of the intra-Palestinian agreement last week in Cairo. In this regard, we strongly commend the efforts of the brotherly Arab Republic of Egypt to reunify the Palestinian people and support stability in the region.

Despite international efforts to achieve peace in the region, Israel continues to violate international laws and resolutions and to expand its illegal settlement activities, hindering the two-State solution. The illegal Israeli practices against the Palestinian people have resulted in the deterioration of the humanitarian, economic and social conditions in the occupied Palestinian territories. This situation has been exploited by terrorist groups and their supporters to spread extremism and violence in the Middle East.

The United Arab Emirates reaffirms the need to put an end to the Israeli occupation and to grant the Palestinian people their inalienable rights, including their right to establish an independent Palestinian State based on the June 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, in accordance with all international resolutions, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Madrid principles. In addition, we stress the importance of providing support to meet the needs of the Palestinian people and empowering them to build their State and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, like all other countries. This year, the United Arab Emirates has provided additional contributions to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Middle East to enable the Agency to deliver basic services to the Palestinian people, including nutrition, education and health care.

It is important to continue to work to reach a just and comprehensive solution to the Palestinian cause. The United Arab Emirates is also actively working to restore stability in our region, which is enduring multiple dangerous conflicts and crises. The absence of security and stability in the region has caused significant loss of life, the displacement of people and the destruction of economic and social infrastructure.

There is no doubt that the continued provocative behaviour and regional intervention of rogue States, as well as their support of extremism and terrorism, have destabilized the region and threaten international security. Therefore, these States must respect their obligations under international law and the Charter of the United Nations and stop spreading conflicts and regional and international chaos. The Security Council and the international community should hold countries that support and finance terrorism accountable and demonstrate zero tolerance for whomever offers assistance or safe haven to terrorist groups that wreak havoc in the region.

In conclusion, we emphasize that political solutions to the crises in Libya, Syria and Yemen are the only way to restore stability. In this regard, the United Arab Emirates reaffirms its support for United Nations peace efforts to encourage parties in these countries to negotiate and reach comprehensive and political solutions.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Nigeria.

Mr. Haidara (Nigeria): We thank you, Madam, for convening today's meeting, which provides us with an opportunity to reflect on recent developments in the Middle East. We thank Assistant Secretary-General Jenča for his informative briefing.

Nigeria aligns itself with the statement delivered by the representative of Venezuela on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

After years of tension, we welcome the decision of Hamas to accept the conditions of the Ramallah Government to reunite the West Bank and Gaza into one entity, under one law and one Government. In that regard, Nigeria welcomes the signing of the intra-Palestinian agreement in Cairo on 12 October. We commend the President of the State of Palestine and all other concerned stakeholders on that achievement. We particularly express our deep appreciation to the Government of Egypt for its crucial role in facilitating the agreement. We believe that the development will facilitate in lifting the closures of the crossings, while addressing Israel's legitimate security concerns, and unlock international support for Gaza's growth, stability and prosperity, which is critical to efforts to achieve lasting peace.

It is essential to continue to engage with Israel, the Palestinian authorities and the region in support of that process. In the meantime, it is essential to address the humanitarian situation in Gaza, which has had an impact on the health and the social and economic well-being of the population. In that regard, we encourage the international community to act accordingly. We seize the opportunity of this debate to underline that continued settlement activity on the part of Israel, which is illegal under international law, is undermining the two-State solution. It is a matter of great concern to us. The two-State solution lies at the heart of the Middle East peace process. It has the support of the international community and is widely acknowledged as the path to lasting peace between the two sides. We urge the Israeli political leadership to demonstrate its commitment to the two-State solution.

We call on States with influence over the parties to encourage them to re-engage in dialogue on the basis of relevant Security Council resolutions, the Madrid principles, the Middle East Quartet road map, the Arab Peace Initiative and existing agreements between the parties. Nigeria reaffirms its unwavering support for a two-State solution, with Israel and Palestine existing side by side in peace and security.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Jordan.

Mr. Al-Moumani (Jordan) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I congratulate France on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for the month of October. I would like to thank Mr. Jenča for his extremely useful briefing.

The members of the Security Council and the international community have reiterated in various international forums the importance of achieving peace and stability in the Middle East, demonstrating their conviction that stability in the region is in the interests of both the region and the international community as a whole and will foster international peace and security. We agree on that common ground. We share the wish for peace and recognize the need to take into account the

aspirations of peoples to achieve stability. We reiterate that peace will be possible only through cooperation and dialogue, along with joint efforts to address the underlying causes of the conflict and to deal with them objectively, in accordance with international law and relevant Security Council resolutions.

Jordan has played a major role in the Middle East's political landscape, especially through our wise and balanced foreign policy in a region that is rife with conflict. We are a haven of peace and enjoy close relations with all of the various regional and international partners. We shall use those relations in order to promote peace and security in the region, tackle terrorism and find peaceful solutions to conflicts, especially the Arab-Israeli conflict. Reaching a lasting, comprehensive solution to the Palestinian question is a major factor for political stability in the region. We welcome all efforts to seek a just settlement to the question, which could drive forward the peace process and relaunch and reactivate time-bound negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians on the basis of the two-State solution. That is the only means of resolving the issue.

Israel's future and its acceptance by the region and the Arab/Muslim world are dependent on the future of the Palestinians. Peace will not emerge between the two parties until an independent Palestinian State is established within the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. There are many elements to this issue, especially with respect to the Arab, Muslim and international consensus regarding the two-State solution. That is reiterated in the Arab Peace Initiative, which defined the political horizon necessary to a peaceful solution that would meet the aspirations of the Palestinian people, while also taking Israeli interests into account.

Under the Hashemite custodial protection of Muslim and Christian holy sites, Jordan has made great efforts to defend holy sites in Jerusalem and preserve their historic and legal importance. It has undertaken diplomatic initiatives in many international forums, especially UNESCO, and the promotion of international Arab consensus regarding a number of resolutions that retain Jerusalem on the agenda of the UNESCO Executive Board, which reiterates that the legislative and administrative measures taken by Israel to change the nature of Jerusalem and its legal status are null and void. I reiterate the importance of the most recent resolution adopted by the 58 States members of the UNESCO Executive Board.

We reiterate the importance of the national reconciliation agreement between the Palestinians as the first major step towards putting an end to divisions and promoting Palestinian national unity, thereby contributing to conditions conducive to Israeli-Palestinian negotiations with the goal of creating an independent Palestinian State within the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. We support Egypt's efforts and highlight its role in bringing about Palestinian national reconciliation.

With regard to the Syrian crisis, we shall use our relations with all stakeholders to achieve peace in Syria. We have reached an agreement with the United States and the Russian Federation that will end to violence in the south and west of Syria. We emphasize the importance of achieving a political solution to the Syrian crisis that would preserve Syria's territorial integrity and ensure a better future that will meet the aspirations of the Syrian people and allow for the return of Syrian refugees and the reconstruction of the country.

We reaffirm our cooperation with all international partners to establish a peaceful and stable environment throughout Syria with a view to allowing access to humanitarian aid for all of those in need and to promoting stability for the Syrian people, who have experienced seven years of violence. We hope that the Astana peace process and the Geneva talks, which are both taking place under the auspices of the United Nations, will promote the political process, taking into account the various relevant Security Council resolutions, especially resolution 2254 (2015).

We restate the importance of putting an end to the Yemeni crisis. There is a need to restore legitimacy and calm in Yemen, on the basis of the Gulf Cooperation Council initiative and its Implementation Mechanism, as well as the National Dialogue Conference and relevant Security Council resolutions, especially resolution 2216 (2015).

We support the plan approved by the United Nations to relaunch the peace process in Libya, and hope that we will be able to provide the Libyan people with a good transitional mechanism.

Lastly, we shall make every effort to put an end to the extremism and terrorism that are destabilizing the

Middle East. We reaffirm the importance of combating terrorism at all levels, theoretical and practical alike, which requires collective international endeavours with respect to the Middle East and elsewhere. The peoples of the region want peace and stability and peaceful solutions to the crises. Achieving stability is key to promoting economic and sustainable development, in addition to investing in the future, our youth and generations to come.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now call on the representative of Cuba.

Mrs. Rodríguez Camejo (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): We welcome this open debate of the Security Council and support the statement made by the delegation of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

Once again, we express our deep concern over the situation in the Middle East, in particular the lack of tangible progress towards a just, peaceful, comprehensive and lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which is at the heart of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

It is regrettable that since the last time the Council convened to consider this issue, there has been no improvement in the situation on the ground. The occupation of the Palestinian territory continues, as do the confiscation of Palestinian lands and property, the construction and expansion of settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, forced displacement, the full gamut of illegal settlement policies and practices, and collective punishment of the Palestinian people.

The Security Council must adopt concrete measures to put an end to this historic injustice without further delay. It should also immediately put an end to the nearly decade-long blockade of the Gaza Strip, where more than 2 million Palestinian civilians are immersed in a deep socioeconomic and humanitarian crisis.

Cuba notes and supports the initiatives to resume direct peace negotiations between Palestinians and Israelis and to promote reconciliation and intra-Palestinian unity. Our country will continue to support a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict that is based on a two-State solution and allows the Palestinians to enjoy their right to self-determination and a free, independent and sovereign State, with its capital in East Jerusalem and within the pre-1967 borders, as well as the right of refugees to return. We will also continue to support the entry of Palestine as a full Member of the United Nations.

With regard to the Syrian Golan, Cuba demands the end of the Israeli occupation and reiterates that any measures or actions that have been or are being taken to change the legal, physical and demographic status and the institutional structure of the occupied Syrian Golan, as well as Israel's measures to exercise its jurisdiction and administration in that territory, constitute violations of international law, international agreements, the Charter and resolutions of the United Nations, including Security Council resolution 497 (1981), and the Fourth Geneva Convention.

Cuba calls for a constructive and respectful dialogue among the peoples of the region and for an end to the violence, interference in internal affairs, foreign aggression and conflicts in the Middle East.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now call on the representative of Maldives.

Mr. Mohamed (Maldives): My delegation wishes to thank France, in its capacity as President of the Security Council, for convening this open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

An independent Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living side by side with Israel, is the only solution to the question of Palestine. We believe that the only viable way to that end is for Israel to withdraw from the occupied territories to the pre-1967 borders and allow refugees to return to their rightful lands.

The Security Council did the right thing by adopting the historic resolution 2334 (2016) in December 2016, demanding that Israel immediately and completely cease all settlement activities in occupied Palestine, including East Jerusalem. The Security Council made it crystal clear that it will not recognize any changes to the 4 June 1967 lines, including with regard to Jerusalem, other than those agreed by the two sides through negotiations.

The Maldives strongly condemns the restrictions imposed by the occupying Power to alter the historic and legal status quo in East Jerusalem, notably Al-Haram Al-Sharif, including the Al-Aqsa Mosque. The Government of Maldives calls on the occupying Power, Israel, to immediately stop its illegal activities

and respect its international legal obligations, including relevant Security Council resolutions.

The Maldives also welcomes the third report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016), and supports the calls for substantive written reports in support of the Council's duties to advance the resolution's objectives. We believe that proper documentation is necessary, especially when Israel, as the occupying Power, continues to disregard the Council's legally binding resolutions.

The Maldives calls on the Council to intensify its efforts in implementing the resolution so as to ensure that Israel brings an end to the illegal occupation of Palestine and the Syrian Golan, recognizes and respects the sovereignty of the independent State of Palestine, and allows for the return of refugees. The Council has the solemn responsibility of enforcing its own resolutions. It carries with it the hopes and aspirations of the oppressed and victims of oppression. Let us keep those hopes alive.

Such hopes are indeed in short supply in Syria. The conflict in that historic country is in its seventh year. Since the start of the conflict, hundreds and thousands of people have been killed, millions have been displaced, hospitals and basic infrastructure have been reduced to rubble and entire cities have been destroyed, along with the country's cultural heritage. The people of Syria continue to live in fear of an uncertain future. The Maldives calls upon the international community and the members of the Security Council to bring an immediate end to the conflict.

Both in Palestine and Syria, one important human rights value is missing, which is at the core of the conflict. That is the value of respect for basic human rights. It should not cost the warring parties in Syria too much to respect the human rights of one another. Similarly, it should not cost Israel too much to respect the basic human rights and human dignity of the Palestinians. Respecting Palestine's right to self-determination, independence and sovereignty is in everyone's interests.

Those are values that the Maldives will promote and bring to the work of the Security Council if it is elected to the Council in the elections held next year for the term 2019-2020. We will work with everyone concerned to craft shared solutions for a shared destiny, a destiny of sustainable peace.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Norway.

Mr. Hattrem (Norway): At the outset, let me thank France for assuming the presidency of the Council this month.

Norway is concerned about the recent military escalation in northern Iraq. We urge all parties to resolve the conflict by peaceful means. Further escalation will only exacerbate the difficult humanitarian situation for millions of Iraqi civilians. It is now vital that we remain united in our efforts to combat the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). ISIL has lost most of its territory in both Iraq and Syria, in great part due to the efforts of the Global Coalition Against Da'esh and its partners.

In Syria, the latest development in Raqqa is promising. At the same time, humanitarian access continues to be difficult, despite the establishment of de-escalation zones. We therefore call on the Council to ensure that humanitarian actors have access to all areas throughout Syria where assistance is needed. We also call on the Council to help secure a viable political resolution of the conflict, as only this can bring a sustained reduction in violence and prevent new wars in the future.

Durable peace, security and prosperity for Israelis and Palestinians alike can be achieved only through a negotiated two-State solution. Norway welcomes the ongoing United States efforts to restart talks and stands ready to support a political process. The situation is fragile because the political process has been at a standstill for a long time. The international donor group for Palestine, the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of International Assistance to Palestinians (AHLC), met in New York on 18 September to take stock of the Palestinian State-building process and to provide support to a negotiated two-State solution. The AHLC discussed ways of improving the Palestinian economy and addressed the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Gaza. Our strategic priorities as the Chair of the AHLC remain threefold: the fiscal sustainability of the Palestinian Authority's budget, sustained economic development with a focus on energy and water, and the recovery of Gaza.

Norway welcomes the agreement signed by Fatah and Hamas in Cairo on 12 October. This is an important step towards a full return of the Palestinian Authority to Gaza. We commend the efforts of Egypt, and we urge all parties to seize this opportunity. Efforts to

improve the humanitarian situation for the people of Gaza are vital.

We are deeply concerned by the deteriorating situation in Yemen. All parties must respect universal human rights and international humanitarian law, especially as regards the rights and needs of children.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Turkey.

Mr. Begeç (Turkey): The Palestinian issue remains the core challenge for regional and global stability. An independent State of Palestine based on the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital is the only way for a just, comprehensive and lasting peace that can also ensure security for both sides.

At the same time, we all should acknowledge the importance of the preservation of the historical status and sanctity of Al-Haram Al-Sharif. The crisis back in July reminded us once again that attempts to change the status quo would jeopardize peaceful coexistence. To prevent further crises, provocative steps in violation of the relevant United Nations resolutions should be avoided. In addition, measures in contravention of international law, in particular continuing settlement activities that harm the perspective of the two-State solution, must stop. Above all, Israel is expected to show political will for a lasting peace, end the occupation and start working towards a future of harmony with its neighbours.

We have always emphasized that reaching a lasting peace also requires the Palestinians to voice their legitimate demands in unity. Therefore, we wholeheartedly welcome the reconciliation agreement signed on 12 October between the representatives of Fatah and Hamas. We congratulate the people of Palestine on this significant step towards national unity. We will continue to support our Palestinian brothers and sisters in successfully advancing this process. The agreement clearly refers to ending the occupation and establishing the sovereignty of the Palestinian State on all of the Palestinian territories occupied in 1967. The international community must respond to this resolute step taken by Palestine. The Palestinian people deserve a strong confirmation of the two-State vision and genuine efforts to end the protracted humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

Last but not least, we welcome the recent membership of the State of Palestine to INTERPOL. This was another important step for its full integration into the international system and a strong message of solidarity by the international community.

Turkey continues its intensive efforts to achieve a sustainable ceasefire in Syria and create an environment conducive to a genuine political transition, in line with the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex) and resolution 2254 (2015). At the latest round of Astana talks on 14 and 15 September, the guarantor States declared the establishment of the Idlib de-escalation area and agreed on the deployment of observers in the security zones around that area. In line with the memorandum on the creation of de-escalation areas in the Syrian Arab Republic and its modalities, Turkey started reconnaissance activities and initial deployment in Idlib last week. The Astana talks have helped the efforts to calm the situation on the ground and created an environment conducive to holding the latest four rounds of Geneva talks. We hope that the Idlib de-escalation area will give further impetus to the political process in Geneva. We are looking forward to the next round of Geneva talks and expect to see some concrete results.

The opposition has already displayed its political maturity by engaging in real talks and increasing its interaction with the different groups. However, if we are sincere about achieving a durable political solution, expecting steps only from the opposition will be neither enough nor fair. The regime representatives should be pushed to start talking seriously about the real political issues pertaining to transition in the next round. We would like to see a stable, prosperous and democratic future Syria that preserves its political unity and territorial integrity. The reconstruction of the conflict-torn country is important to ensuring proper living conditions for the Syrians and enable their voluntary return. However, recovery and reconstruction support require a credible political process leading to a genuine political transition. The regime must not and should not be rewarded for the destruction it has created. Only a multidimensional long-term strategy can achieve the dual objectives of eliminating terrorism and stabilizing Syria. Our aim should be no terrorists and no State terror in Syria. We cannot achieve that without addressing the root cause of the conflict or by replacing one terrorist organization with another.

Turkey's resolve to fight Da'esh and other terrorist organizations in Syria, such as the Democratic Union Party/People's Protection Units, remains firm.

Unilateral steps threatening the unity, territorial integrity and demographic structure of Syria and efforts to seek territorial expansion for political leverage are unacceptable. Inclusiveness and local ownership are essential for the establishment of legitimate administrations in areas liberated from the terrorist organizations. While we refocus our efforts on ceasefire and political talks, accountability remains a central concern. Reconciliation and sustainable peace in Syria will be built upon our success on this matter. We support all efforts to that end, in particular investigations of the regime's use of chemical weapons. The Syrian people deserve and will have justice.

Before I conclude my remarks, I would like to underline that we are closely following developments in the aftermath of the Kurdistan Regional Government's unconstitutional referendum. Turkey does not and will not recognize this initiative. Unilateral moves that challenge Iraq's territorial integrity and political unity, as well as the presence of the Kurdish Workers Party and other terrorist organizations, instigate further instability. We believe that lasting peace and stability in Iraq can be achieved through inclusive national reconciliation within the constitutional framework.

The President (*spoke in French*): I give the floor to the representative of Bahrain.

Mr. Alrowaiei (Bahrain) (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank you, Madam President, for convening today's meeting. It is being held against a backdrop of major developments and challenges in our region.

The Kingdom of Bahrain underscores that achieving just, comprehensive and lasting peace will remain directly related to restoring the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people. That will be achieved through the establishment of a Palestinian State, based on the June 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem at its capital, as outlined by the relevant international resolutions, the Arab Peace Initiative and the two-State solution, and by ending the occupation of Palestinian territory and the settlement activities that Israel continues to conduct, in blatant violation of Security Council resolutions. In that regard, we welcome the recent important steps taken by the Palestinian factions to end divisions, renounce violence and work together peacefully.

The Kingdom of Bahrain stresses the importance of undertaking efforts to achieve a political solution that preserves the political independence and territorial integrity of Syria, prevents interference in its domestic affairs, eliminates all terrorist organizations and secures peace for all Syrians. The Kingdom of Bahrain reiterates its long-standing position of support for the legitimate Government in Yemen, under the presidency of Mr. Abdrabuh Mansour Hadi Mansour, through our participation in the Arab coalition forces to restore legitimacy in Yemen, end the control of foreign-backed militia groups and reach a comprehensive political solution, based on reparations documents, the Gulf Cooperation Council initiative and the Implementation Mechanism, international dialogue outcomes and resolution 2216 (2015). The goal is to end all external intervention and ease the humanitarian crisis suffered by the Yemeni people. We thank the Special Envoy for Yemen, Mr. Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, for his efforts.

Combating terrorism and extremism in all their forms and manifestations, regardless of their motivations and wherever they occur in the Middle East, is one of the most important elements to achieve peace and stability in the region and the world. Therefore, the Kingdom of Bahrain applauds the policies of His Excellency Mr. Donald Trump in an attempt to end chaos and combat terrorism.

In conclusion, the Kingdom of Bahrain reaffirms its commitment to working with the international community to address and overcome all challenges in the Middle East. We are eager to eliminate the threats posed to the region and to achieve a peaceful and stable future for all people of the region.

The President (*spoke in French*): I give the floor to the representative of Saudi Arabia.

Ms. Radwan (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to begin by congratulating you, Madam President, on France's assumption of the presidency of the Security Council this month. We also thank you for convening today's open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine. I welcome the efforts of your friendly nation to revive a peace process that guarantees Palestinian rights and the establishment of a sovereign Palestinian State, based on pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as it capital. We reiterate that we will cooperate in those efforts.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia welcomes the reconciliation agreement among Palestinians. We look forward to the agreement's impact on the hopes and aspirations of the Palestinian people by ending divisiveness and achieving national unity. That will empower our Palestinian brothers and sisters to enjoy

their legitimate rights, as outlined in the various international resolutions. In that regard, we commend the efforts of our Egyptian brothers and sisters, who helped to make that step possible. We condemn Israel's attempts to obstruct the agreement and call on it to work in good faith to achieve a positive outcome.

The only path to peace is to return to the Arab Peace Initiative, which my country presented more than 15 years ago, to establish an effective international mechanism to ensure that the Palestinian people reclaim all their inalienable rights, within a specific time frame and through the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, based on pre-1967 borders. Israel must withdraw from all occupied Arab territory, including the Syrian Golan and Lebanese territories, cease its illegal settlement activities on Palestinian territory and halt all unilateral measures taken in Jerusalem.

While regional efforts are being stepped up to salvage the two-State solution and the international community agrees that the main obstacle facing the peace process is the Israeli occupation and settlement-building, Israeli authorities pursue their expansionist policies. In recent weeks, Israel has approved plans to build thousands of housing units and begun to construct 2,600 units in East Jerusalem. This would result in a settlement barrier separating Jerusalem from the rest of the Palestinian territory. Israel has also continued to build more than 30 units in Hebron — a grave turn of events that could escalate tensions. Those units will be built on the verge of the Abrahamic Sanctuary, on territory that the occupying Power had previously expropriated for illegitimate reasons. Plans have also been adopted to build more than 12,200 housing units in the West Bank.

Israel has also enacted a law legitimizing the construction of approximately 4,000 residential units in the occupied West Bank and allowing Israel to expropriate Palestinian land and for new settlements to be added to existing settlements at any time. That is a clear and irrefutable indication that Israel's settlement plans will undermine all opportunities for the establishment of a viable Palestinian State. Israel is maintaining its de facto policy to quash all opportunities to achieve a genuine two-State solution. We underscore that such illegitimate measures must be decisively countered by the Security Council and by international judicial bodies.

Israel's decade-long blockade of Gaza is one of the worst manifestations of Israeli occupation. It has led to poverty and a deterioration of living standards, which result in environmental and humanitarian crises that threaten all areas of life.

The rights of the Palestinian people cannot be curtailed. We will continue to voice our support of the Palestinian people, rejecting all attempts by Israel to impose control and continue settlement activities, and opposing all unilateral actions to change the status quo in Jerusalem and Al-Haram Al-Sharif. We also warn against the risk of exacerbating the situation, thereby leading to an escalation that could have implications throughout and far beyond our region.

With regard to the Syrian issue, the King of Saudi Arabia commends the work of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, the United States of America and the Russian Federation to establish de-escalation zones in the southern part of Syria. We hope that such cooperation will lead to the establishment of no-fly zones in Syria, thereby ensuring the safety of civilians and leading to a ceasefire throughout Syrian territory, especially as we witness the Syrian regime's continued killing and forced displacement of persons with the assistance of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and other militias, including Hizbullah.

We also commend the progress of the Global Coalition against Da'esh/the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant. The King of Saudi Arabia is a partner in the Coalition, which is aimed at liberating Iraqi and Syrian territory from Da'esh. We emphasize that the elimination of terrorism in all its forms will be neither successful nor sustainable unless all foreign terrorist fighters leave, including those who are fighting alongside the Syrian regime and participating in the gravest atrocities against the Syrian people. More than 10 million people are in need of assistance, including more than 3 million who have been trapped in besieged and hard-to-reach areas and face great peril. In that regard, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia reaffirms the importance of the international community maintaining its strong stance against all forms of besiegement and the killing practiced by the Syrian regime and its allies.

We believe that the struggle of the Syrian people for dignity and freedom must eventually achieve its end. The stability of the region and the world depends on the Syrian people realizing their dream. We call for joint efforts and the establishment of a transitional authority

in Syria that will serve the Syrian people; help them to achieve their aspirations to peace, security and justice; and renounce extremism, fanaticism and violence. In that context, we emphasize our support for the strategy announced by United States President Donald Trump with regard to eliminating the terrorist threat posed by Iran in Syria and the region, in general.

Saudi Arabia has previously supported the nuclear deal based on its belief that we must work towards the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, but Iran has exploited the economic returns of the lifting of sanctions and continued to destabilize the region, including through developing its ballistic-missile programme and supporting terrorism through its Revolutionary Guard, Hizbullah and the Houthi militias. Accordingly, we commend the vision of the United States Administration, and its commitment to work together with allies to confront Iran's aggressive policies.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Malaysia.

Mrs. Taib (Malaysia): I thank you, Madam President, for convening and chairing this meeting. I am grateful to Mr. Miroslav Jenča, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his briefing this morning.

My delegation associates itself with the statement delivered by the representative of Venezuela on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries (NAM).

On 25 September, the third report on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) for the period from 20 June to 20 September was presented verbally by Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General (see S/PV.8054). During the presentation of the report, we heard once again a recounting of the blatant disregard of the call for the implementation of the provisions in the resolution, including an increase in the rate of settlement activity.

We remain disappointed by the continued illegal Israeli settlements, which reflect gross violations of Palestinian human rights and a blatant disregard of the provisions outlined in resolution 2334 (2016). When the Security Council finally decided to take action to preserve the two-State solution in December 2016, we did not expect to see the continued disregard for the responsibility to implement the resolution.

During the NAM Ministerial Meeting on Palestine in September, we recalled that the political declaration had highlighted the importance of the Secretary-General's reports on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016), and, as such, we are committed to support the movement to institutionalize that position and explicitly outline measures to ensure that non-compliance is addressed.

We recognize positive developments and are encouraged by the reconciliation agreement arrived at by Fatah and Hamas on 12 October in Cairo. We urge the negotiating parties to remain fully committed and to stay on track with regard to honouring those commitments so as to allow unity to prevail and the Palestinian Government to assume its responsibilities in Gaza, including addressing the grave humanitarian crisis there.

The prolonged occupation and the sustained settlement enterprise cannot be viewed lightly in the face of positive developments. They have generated only more despair, frustration and insecurity in the region and beyond. We cannot let the Palestinian plight continue to fall on deaf ears.

Malaysia reiterates the need to address the root cause of the conflict by ending the repressive occupation of Palestine by Israel. The international community must not remain a bystander in relation to the worsening situation on the ground. We are of the view that it is misleading to assume that the occupying Power and the occupied people have the same level of legal, political and moral obligations and responsibilities. We restate that substantial obligations are clearly imposed on occupying Powers to protect the general welfare of the inhabitants of an occupied territory, including the protection from forcible transfer, and the protection of their property. We believe that silence with regard to that is as good as being complicit.

In conclusion, the words of the Secretary-General during his recent visit resonated with us and must be reaffirmed by all of us here that the international community cannot simply turn away and allow the situation to deteriorate. We have a role and a responsibility to support the parties in resolving the conflict. Malaysia remains committed to advancing a just, comprehensive and final solution to the conflict that would see the establishment of an independent, contiguous and viable Palestinian State based on the

1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital, living side-by-side in peace and security with Israel.

The President (*spoke in French*): The representative of Israel has asked for the floor to make a further statement. I now give her the floor.

Ms. Meitzad (Israel): Allow me to comment on some of the statements that were heard earlier today.

The Iranian representative is under the assumption that his baseless allegation will somehow divert the Security Council's attention from his regime's deadly policies and activities. Iran is engaged in a campaign of aggression in and beyond the Middle East. It backs and assists the Al-Assad regime, which continues to kill hundreds of thousands of Syrians, including through the use of the world's most despicable means — chemical weapons. It fuels some of the worst conflicts in our world today in Yemen and elsewhere. Wherever there is terror, there is Iran. Iran can say all it wants in the Council, but there will never be enough words to mask Iran's true identity. Iran is the world's first and main sponsor of terror, in both words and deeds.

As for the Lebanese Ambassador, who spoke of justice and gave advice, what exactly is justice? Where is justice in the conditions which Palestinians and Syrians endure in Lebanon under the country's discriminatory legislation? And on what grounds does he have the authority to give advice? Is it on the ground of having a Government that is controlled by a designated terrorist organization and the moral basis of following policies created by Hizbullah operatives? To those countries, I would recommend taking a long look in the mirror before taking the floor, and especially before attempting to advise others.

The meeting rose at 3.30 p.m.